

THRILLING DETECTIVE

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THE *DEAD*
DON'T *Cry*

A Michael Shayne
Novel

By BRETT
HALLIDAY

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

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A Johnny Castle Novelet
By C. S. MONTANYE

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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. LIII, No. 3

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

December, 1944



A Complete Mystery Novel

THE DEAD DON'T CRY

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Red-headed private detective Michael Shayne barges into a jewel robbery and murder case that puts him on the spot—and calls for every bit of his courage and resourcefulness! 11

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Where readers, writers and the editor meet

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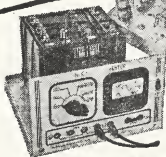
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HEADQUARTERS

Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet



READERS, get ready for thrills—our next issue will be a humdinger! Featuring three of the best complete novelets we have ever given you! Just listen!

First there will be **THREE HOURS OF DANGER**, by that well-known weaver of intricate detective chillers, Armstrong Livingston. It's really a grand yarn! You see—Old "Pop" Cooper was up for re-election as Sheriff of Sycamore County, way up there in the backwoods. Things looked bad for his retention in office. He was sixty and "too old-fashioned," they said.

Then late one night the body of old Angus Furguson was found in his lonely little cabin. It was a bit of a gruesome sight to the sheriff and his lately-sworn-in deputy who had found the body. The corpse had one foot bared and there were signs of nasty work with matches. Every time the sheriff tried to reach the State Police by phone, there was no answer. It looked as if the wires were cut.

And Then—a Kidnaping!

Directly atop of this killing—the whole story takes place in three hours—word comes by way of Parsons, the frantic and disheveled butler, that little three-year-old Mary Penton has been kidnaped. Two masked men and a car are involved. The sheriff follows the tracks of the machine only to find the car overturned and empty at the bottom of a deep gully.

There's an unexpected doublecrossing and then the tiny little blanket bearing the initials "M.P." is found. Is that just a come on? Of course young Bud Lorimer of the Sycamore *Daily Herald* helps a bit and Pop uses some up-to-date persuasion

with a length of rubber hose, but—

How Pop Cooper matches his "rube" wits against the cold and calculating cunning of the deadly Kidnaper Kid will crinkle the hair at the base of your skull! Needless to say, the old sheriff is NOT cast aside for a younger and more up-to-date guardian of the peace.

You see it turns out that it was a good thing the phone wires were cut. The State Police didn't have a chance to come in with "crime laboratories, flags flying, bands playing and fresh supplies of tear gas," as young Lorimer says. Old Pop was on his own!

You'll be entertainingly stumped trying to solve **THREE HOURS OF DANGER**, which will keep you guessing until the very last page. You'll admire Pop Cooper for his sagacity and his humor. We're sure you'll agree, when you read this yarn, that Armstrong Livingston is a writer of detective fiction par excellence!

Willie Brann in Action

Also on the blotter is a brand new Willie Brann novelet, yeclt **MURDER IS NO TECHNICALITY**. Willie and his faithful St. Bernard, Maxey, came upon the scene of an accident on their way home one night. Below the road, at the foot of an embankment, a man lay dead in a wrecked car. A passing motorist picked up the girl who had been with him and rushed her to a doctor. Her face was terribly slashed and disfigured by the sharp rocks she had been thrown upon.

It was an ordinary road accident, the fault of the driver. And his sister, heir to his considerable estate, prepared at once to

(Continued on page 8)



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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

pay the girl victim the sum of \$75,000 for the terrible disfigurement caused her. Which was noble.

Too noble, Willie Brann thought. For he had gone down that embankment to see if anything could be done for the man in the wrecked car and he had come up again with his clothes full of sand burrs. Yet the girl's dress, when he examined it at the hospital, had no sign of any burrs whatever! Ergo, she had never been down that embankment or anywhere near those rocks! Yet her face was dreadfully disfigured! How? Why?

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There are thrills galore in Willie Brann's new adventure: **MURDER IS NO TECHNICALITY.**

Was It Suicide?

Last but far from least on the docket, will be **DEATH ON THE METER**, a novel by Edward Ronns, whose stories, "The Flaw" and "Murder Buys a Hat" provided such interesting and enthralling reading in previous issues of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** magazine—remember?

Our friend, Enoch Dolliver of Homicide, gets word that there has been a phone call from one Sally Burgess, lady taxi-driver of the Red Streak Cab Company, to the effect that one of Sally's fellow-workers in that field of endeavor, a girl named Lubelle Sat-

(Continued on page 79)

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Lana screamed as the gun swung downward and struck Shayne

The Dead Don't Cry

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Red-headed private detective Michael Shayne barges into a jewel robbery and murder case that puts him on the spot—and calls for every bit of his courage and resourcefulness!

CHAPTER I A BURGLAR—AND SUICIDE

IT WAS mid-morning when Michael Shayne entered his office in downtown New Orleans. Lucy Hamilton, his competent and youthful secretary, eyed him accusingly from her desk across the small reception hall.

"This is a fine time to come to work," she said. "A Mr. Horace Teton has been calling

you all morning, and you've a client inside waiting."

Shayne shrugged out of a soggy trench coat and arched a ragged red eyebrow at her. "Teton? I don't know—"

"Mutual Indemnity," she reminded him briskly. "It's about an emerald necklace. And the client is an Army lieutenant." She glanced at a pad by her elbow. "His name is Drinkley and he's nice."

Shayne tossed a rain-soaked hat at a

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hook in the corner. "Get Teton," he said.

He took two long strides past Lucy and opened the door to an inner office. A young officer jumped to his feet as the detective walked in. He had tousled blond hair and his thin face was marked with lines of strain or fatigue. His eyes were deeply blue.

He gave the redhead a hot, moist hand and said rapidly:

"I'm Lieutenant Drinkley, Mr. Shayne. I just finished officer's training at Miami Beach and met a friend of yours there. Timothy Rourke. That's why I've come to you this morning." His voice was thin and reedy with emotion. He clamped his lips together tightly when he ended.

"Tim Rourke?" Shayne said.

He went to the swivel chair behind the bare oak desk and sat down. He grinned widely and got a bottle of cognac and two glasses out of the top right-hand drawer.

"I need your help, Mr. Shayne," Drinkley said with desperate intensity. "Rourke told me about some of your cases—the big fees you charge. I can't—I'm not rich—"

Shayne poured out two glasses of cognac and shoved one across the desk.

"Drink that down or you'll be needing a doctor instead of a detective. We'll talk about a fee later."

His telephone rang. He muttered, "Excuse me," lifted the receiver, and said, "Shayne," into the mouthpiece.

A harassed voice—Teton's—came over the wire.

"I have to see you at once, Shayne. The Lomax emeralds are missing and we have them insured for a hundred and twenty-five thousand. How soon can you be here?"

"Straight ten per cent?" Shayne interrupted.

"I presume so." Teton's voice was dismal.

Shayne promised, "I'll be up to your office in a few minutes."

He pronged the receiver and lifted his glass.

The young officer, hesitated.

"I'm not a drinking man," he said weakly, but he leaned forward and picked up the glass Shayne had shoved toward him. He lifted it with trembling fingers and held it to his mouth until it was empty, then sank back into his chair.

"It's terrible, Mr. Shayne!" he burst out. "I arrived in New Orleans just this morning. I had seven days' leave and Katrin and I were to be married today. And she's—dead!"

Shayne didn't say anything.

"She committed suicide last night." Lieutenant Drinkley clenched his teeth tightly. "Her name was Katrin Moe," he whispered. "Norwegian. We met six months ago while I was stationed here. Our love was fine and

clean—like wonderful music. Like a day in spring with sunlight on the clover and a breeze in the trees. It was . . . Oh, God!" He buried his face in his hands.

SHAYNE leaned back and played with the empty glass in front of him. It was starkly still in the office.

Drinkley went on after a moment in a more controlled tone:

"Katrin was working as a maid in the home of Mr. Norton Lomax. She's been studying hard for her citizenship examination, which she passed about a month ago. We corresponded regularly and she was happy, Mr. Shayne. I know she was. Yet she killed herself last night! Why? I've got to know. Don't you see I have to know why?"

"She didn't leave any farewell note? No explanation?"

"Nothing. No one understands why she did it. She went to bed happy last night. Locked her door and then evidently turned on the gas grate. They found her like that this morning—just before my train arrived."

Shayne poured out two more drinks. Drinkley shook his head and got up to go to one of the windows. He turned and said violently:

"I know what comes to your mind! That she'd got herself involved with another man. But I swear it wasn't that. Not Katrin. I knew her mind and her soul, and both were as virginal as her body. You've got to believe me!"

"I do believe you," Shayne muttered.

"Then why would she do it?" Lieutenant Drinkley went back to his chair. "Don't you see I can't stand wondering? I'll always think it may have been something I did or said—though I know it wasn't." He hesitated and then went on harshly, "I have a little over a thousand dollars."

"Tim Rourke gave you the wrong idea about me," Shayne said gently. "Give my secretary fifty dollars for a retainer. Call me this afternoon after I've done some routine checking."

He lifted his cognac glass and drank from it as Drinkley thanked him and went out.

In the reception hall a few minutes later, Lucy gave Michael Shayne a mocking smile.

"So fifty bucks is your usual retainer, Mr. Shayne?" she said.

He picked up his damp coat and hat, scowled at her, and went out.

The Mutual Indemnity office was in the same building a few floors up. Horace Teton, a pale, fussy little man who wore a gray tweed suit and nose-glasses, was waiting for Shayne.

"The Lomax necklace," he explained con-

Shayne grabbed each punk's
head, drove them together
with enough force to knock
them dizzy

LAUREL CLUB



cisely, "was an unusually fine one built around the Ghorshki emerald as a centerpiece in Nineteen thirty-nine, on special order for Mrs. Norton Lomax. Our appraisal at that time was a hundred and fifty thousand."

SHAYNE whistled. "Lomax must be plenty in the dough."

"He was retired at that time," said Teton, "and he considered the necklace a good investment. And quite correctly. In the present market the necklace would easily bring two hundred thousand."

Shayne nodded. "As a necklace. Broken into individual stones and fenced it wouldn't bring more than a tenth of that."

"Quite true," Teton agreed. "Particularly since the Ghorshki stone is so well-known."

"Any chance that Lomax is hard-up for cash?" asked Shayne.

"I don't believe so. He's lately returned to active business and gone into war production. Some sort of gadgets for submarines. But I'm having that angle investigated and by tonight will have a complete report on his financial status."

"Good enough. What about the actual theft?"

"The necklace was kept with other valuables in a small safe of approved design in Mr. Lomax's bedroom. The combination was known only to him and Mrs. Lomax. The house was burglarized night before last while Mr. Lomax was reading in his bedroom."

"He heard the thief in his wife's dressing room, got up from bed and chased the fellow downstairs."

"He knew the safe had been untouched and thought, of course, that the necklace was securely inside it."

"But Mrs. Lomax was away at the time and didn't return until yesterday afternoon. And it didn't occur to her until this morning that she had worn the necklace night before last, and that in hurriedly changing to go on a trip to Baton Rouge she had neglected to lock the emeralds up, leaving them in her dressing table instead. Investigation this morning showed the necklace missing, and the police surmise it was actually stolen night before last."

"Do they see any connection with the suicide out there?"

"The maid? I'm sure I don't know. Katrin Moe was Mrs. Lomax's personal maid and had access to her dressing room, of course."

Shayne nodded. "I'll get the rest from the cops," he said.

He went out and down the elevator. It was still raining when he went out to his car.

At Police Headquarters, he went directly to the office of Inspector Quinlan. The inspector greeted him cordially.

"Some of the boys said you'd located in New Orleans, Shayne," Quinlan said. "I've meant to look you up and thank you for the help you gave me on the Margo Macon case."

Shayne grinned. "You can thank me now," he said easily. "Are you handling the Lomax thing?"

"The necklace or the suicide?"

"Both, I guess. Is there a tie-up?"

"I don't see it yet, but it's sure one coincidence if there isn't. The girl was engaged to an Army lieutenant and was to have been married today. Poor devil! He came out to the Lomax house from the depot while I was there." The inspector ended slowly, "He doesn't believe the girl committed suicide."

"Did she?"

"Her upstairs room was locked on the inside and the gas was turned on. She retired early and died between two and three this morning."

"No suicide note?"

"Nothing." Inspector Quinlan spread his hands. "I didn't like to say this to her fiancé, but there were a couple of birds out there where she was living who might add up to a suicide motive."

Shayne's gray eyes were bleak beneath thatched red brows.

"Go on."

The inspector shrugged. "She was young. A foreigner. Young Eddie Lomax isn't any bargain, but he spends his old man's money and wears pants. He and the other Lomax kid, Clarice, seem to be two of a kind. And then there's the chauffeur."

Shayne rubbed his chin and waited.

"He's what a lot of girls dream about when they're married to guys like you and me," Quinlan explained. "If this Katrin had played around with Eddie Lomax or the chauffeur while her lieutenant was gone—well, maybe she was ashamed to face him on their wedding day."

Shayne shook his head somberly. "I think it'd be smart to pull a P.M. Check for a slow-acting poison that might have taken effect during the night. And find out particularly from Doc Mattson whether there'd ever been a man in her life."

"As a matter of fact I've ordered a P.M. Her lieutenant requested it. He's taking charge of the body because there are no relatives except a brother whose name and whereabouts are unknown. What's up, anyhow? Have you an angle?"

Shayne shook his head.

"Only a love that was like wonderful music—or a day in spring with sunlight on the clover."

Quinlan stared at the redhead in consternation.

"How many snorts have you had this morning?"

"All right," said Shayne angrily. "Maybe you don't know what that stuff means. I knew a girl once . . ." He caught back his anger and explained, "I talked to Lieutenant Drinkley this morning. He sold me. He swears that Katrin was absolutely on the level."

"Maybe," the inspector conceded. "But here's something for you to chew on. Katrin Moe had a plain gold wedding ring in her handbag. It fitted the third finger on her left hand and had been worn quite a lot."

"The devil you say!" Shayne said. He tugged at the lobe of his left ear and his eyes became bright. After a time he shrugged. "What have you got on the burglary out there night before last?" he asked.

"Flink and Brand handled it." Quinlan shuffled some papers on his desk, picked up a typewritten report. "A downstairs library window was forced from the outside. A neat, professional job. The first two floors of the house were prowled and a number of small things stolen. Lomax was in his bedroom all evening and supposed the necklace was in the safe, not knowing that his wife had neglected to lock it up when she left for Baton Rouge late that night. He knew the safe hadn't been touched by the burglar, so he didn't look inside and the necklace wasn't reported stolen until this morning when Mrs. Lomax looked for it."

"Who else knew the necklace wasn't in the safe?"

"There," admitted the inspector wryly, "you may have an answer to the maid's suicide. Mrs. Lomax said Katrin Moe helped her change that night and saw her put the emeralds in her dressing table. Katrin was dead before the loss was discovered, so we couldn't question her. She didn't mention the necklace while the burglary was being investigated. Add that up any way you like. Maybe she just snatched it after the burglary."

"And then went to bed and turned on the gas?" scoffed Shayne.

The inspector shrugged. "A belated attack of conscience," he suggested. "Or the other angle we talked about. Her wedding day coming up and a young girl who's made a misstep who couldn't face it."

Shayne shook his head stubbornly. "I want a definite report from Doc Mattson on the cause of death before I'll believe it was suicide."

"Fair enough." Inspector Quinlan went to the door with Shayne. "I'll give you the autopsy report as soon as it comes in."

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILY LOMAX



HE Lomax residence was an imposing three-storied house on Mirabeau Avenue with embossed French windows, and round wooden columns supporting a second-floor gallery.

A rosy-cheeked maid opened the door for Shayne. She said Mr. Lomax was in the library,

and Shayne followed her down a wide hallway covered with lush carpeting and running the width of the house. A wide mahogany stairway curved upward to the second floor.

The maid opened sliding double doors halfway down the hall and stepped back for Shayne to enter the spacious library lined with bookshelves.

Mr. Norton Lomax got up and advanced questioning from in front of a cheery gas log at the far end of the room. A fringe of white hair decorated his bony scalp and he had a sharp jaw and a long thin nose. He looked about sixty years old, but his step was agile and he had a deep resonant voice.

"Are you from the insurance company?" he asked.

The detective nodded. "Shayne is my name. I've been retained to recover the emeralds." The flesh of Mr. Lomax's hand was soft but his grip was strong.

"I've been expecting someone from your office," Lomax told him, without preamble. "I realize that my wife's negligence puts me in a bad position to press a claim. I wish you'd tell me frankly how your company feels about the matter."

Shayne didn't show his surprise. "It's up to our legal department, of course," he said, "but we have a reputation for not haggling over payment of claims."

Mr. Lomax looked relieved. "It's really my wife's claim," he murmured, "and you know how women are about business matters." His murky blue eyes were harassed.

"We'll cross that bridge when and if we reach it. Right now I'm interested in Katrin Moe's suicide."

"Ah, yes. Certainly you don't think—" "Why did she do it, Mr. Lomax?"

The old man shook his head sadly. "That's what none of us understand. She seemed so happy."

"I'd like to see her room. And hear all about what happened."

"Of course."

Lomax led him into the hall and up the wide stairway to a smaller second-floor hall and a smaller stairway leading up to the third floor. A door at the head of the stairs sagged open and the upper pine panel was shattered.

"This was Katrin's room," Lomax explained. "Neal, our chauffeur, smashed the door when Katrin didn't answer this morning. I reached inside myself and unlocked the door."

There was one gabled window in the small bedroom. An iron bedstead stood in one corner near a hot-air inlet. There was a straight chair and an old highboy with the drawers pulled out. A few toilet articles were laid out on the dressing table. A hat-box and two new suitcases lay open on the floor with little heaps of feminine clothing piled around them. A gas grate was set in a small recess in the wall.

Shayne stood in the doorway and drew in a long breath of air still faintly tinged with the cloying odor of gas.

"I didn't smell any gas coming up the stairs," he said. "I should think it would have filled the house when you opened the door."

"The air-conditioning system has carried it off," Lomax explained. "I had a modern system installed a few years ago, with a hot-air furnace and cold-air outlets. It carries the stale air out of the house entirely and brings in fresh air that is humidified as it goes through the furnace. With the furnace running last night, the police believe she must have turned on the gas early and the room filled so slowly that death didn't come until hours later."

Shayne went to the single window to test it. It refused to open, and ivy grew undisturbed on the ledge outside.

"The window is sealed," Lomax told him quietly. "All the windows were sealed when the air conditioner was installed."

"You're sure there wasn't any death message?"

"The police searched thoroughly for one, and the room was absolutely undisturbed until they arrived. Neal and I entered together, as I've explained. He ran across the room and turned off the grate, and we stayed at the door together until the gas cleared a little. The police arrived and took over while we were both here."

"And none of you have any idea why she did it?"

"None of us," the old man said firmly. "She seemed happy here in her quiet way. We knew of her wedding plans, of course, and approved."

"Was the theft of the necklace discovered before or after Katrin's body was found?"

"About the same time, I believe. My wife and I were having coffee in the upstairs living room when Mrs. Brown, the housekeeper, came in to say she was worried about Katrin who didn't respond to knocking on her locked door."

"Did she always lock her door at night?"

"I believe so. I've heard Rose, the other

maid, teasing her about it."

Shayne nodded. "So Mrs. Brown was worried?"

"I called Neal and came up to Katrin's room. I knocked and called to her, and then realized there was a smell of gas close to her door. When Neal came he smashed the upper panel and the gas fumes rolled out thickly. During the excitement I heard Mrs. Lomax crying that her necklace was missing."

SHAYNE was punishing his ear lobe between thumb and forefinger. He nodded and strolled over to a waste-basket beside the highboy. He turned it over and pawed through the contents. There wasn't much. He picked out a short strip of grayish paper and studied it. It was about four inches long and looked like the outer margin of a newspaper.

"Did Katrin have yesterday's paper up here?" he asked over his shoulder.

"You might ask Mrs. Brown. I hear her coming up now."

Shayne continued to paw through the waste paper and found a small crumpled square from a memo pad with the figures \$29.43 and \$2.94 set underneath for adding, with the total: \$32.37. He slid the slip in his pocket and got up as Mrs. Brown's heavy footsteps neared the door.

She was a red-faced woman of middle-age, wearing a crisp white apron. Her Irish blue eyes snapped angrily when Lomax stopped her and said:

"The detective would like to talk to you, Mrs. Brown. He's investigating the stolen necklace."

"If he thinks he'll be findin' the jools in this poor girl's room, it's mistaken he is," she said indignantly. "A furriner she may have been, but she was a pure sweet girl."

"Perhaps we can go in your room," Shayne said. He glanced at Lomax.

Norton Lomax looked old and tired. "I'll wait for you in the second-floor living room with my wife," he said.

Mrs. Brown took Shayne across the hall to a replica of Katrin's room and seated herself heavily on the bed. Her eyes were narrowed and hostile on the detective.

"I sat with Katrin last night while she finished packin'," she announced at once, "and I'll not believe she was plannin' any such thing."

"Did you hear her lock her door when you came out?" asked Shayne.

"That I did. And didn't she have the reason to with that Eddie traipsin' around at all hours, drunk and all?"

"What about the chauffeur?"

"Now there's a different kind from Eddie. A proper gentleman, he is, and keepin' to his place like a gentleman should—

though it's not that he mightn't do different, mind you." She added that darkly, smacking her lips.

"You say he could do differently if he chose?" Shayne sat down and crossed his long legs.

"That he could. What with Clarice makin' her eyes at him. Ay, and her mother, too, I'll be bound, only she's more sly about it. And them two accusin' a sweet darlin' like Katrin of wrong."

"Do you have yesterday's paper?"

"Katrin gave it to me when she finished reading it." Mrs. Brown reached for a folded newspaper on a table beside her and handed it to him. Shayne spread it out and discovered that a small item had been clipped from the third page in the middle of the right-hand column. He returned the paper and started out, then turned to ask:

"Did you know Katrin had been married? Ever see her wear a wedding ring?"

Mrs. Brown's mouth hung open for an instant before she snapped:

"And now can't a girl have a ring ready when she's to be married? And can't she slip it on her finger sometimes to get the feel of it? Sure and I saw her wearin' it once. 'Twas on her day off and she must've forgot she'd slipped it on for a little while."

"And you didn't ask for any explanation?" Shayne demanded.

"Why should I? 'Twas her business, I'm thinkin'."

Shayne thanked the belligerent housekeeper and went out and down the stairs. He went to an open door across the carpeted second-floor landing and stopped on the threshold, unnoticed for a moment by the three occupants of the large sitting room.

A young girl lolled in a deep chair on one side of the room. Her dark brown hair was cut short and it curled upward in soft ringlets about her discontented face. Her lips were full and red.

An older woman with too-black hair was stretched out in a chaise-longue across from her. She had sharp features and pale cheeks, with a thin mouth that was made to look generous by an over-application of dark rouge. Her eyes were closed and dark lashes curled up from her cheeks.

Lomax sat near her in a blue mohair chair. He got up when he saw Shayne in the doorway.

"Come in and meet my wife and daughter," he said.

Mrs. Lomax acknowledged the introduction without moving.

"Are you going to make trouble about what Mr. Lomax calls my negligence with the necklace?" she asked lazily.

Shayne shook his head. "I expect to recover it."

"Oh," she said, and he didn't know



A girl came out of Drinkley's room

whether she was pleased or not.

When he was introduced to Clarice, the girl quirked her lips and asked impudently:

"It was an inside job, wasn't it, Mr. Shayne?"

SHE was about eighteen, Shayne thought, the sort of pampered girl who took a perverse delight in shocking her parents.

"That's my theory," she went on. "I think someone in this house snatched it yesterday, thinking it would be laid to the burglar."

"Clarice!" her father said sharply.

She disregarded him. "Isn't it a good theory?"

"It makes sense," Shayne agreed. "Who's your candidate?"

"Katrin was always snooping around," she told him viciously.

"That will do, Clarice," Mrs. Lomax said languidly.

"I bet she did it," Clarice declared. "She knew Ted Drinkley didn't really love her."

"That's what you think," an ironic male voice behind Shayne interrupted. "After all the passes you made at him you still keep on kidding yourself he was in love with you."

Shayne jerked around to face a young man with pudgy features and a pimply complexion. He wore dark blue trousers and a short-tailed shirt hanging out. As he swaggered forward he looked like a college boy who wanted desperately to be tough.

"Our son Eddie," said Lomax. "Mr. Shayne."

"You're the detective, huh? Got any clues yet?"

"Where were you last night?"

"Me?" Eddie Lomax's mouth hung vacuously open.

"You," Shayne took a step forward and his voice hardened. "You and your sister seem to think this is a joke. A hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar necklace is missing and a girl has been murdered."

"Murdered?" Mrs. Lomax echoed the ugly word, sitting up straight, while Eddie looked frightened and shifted his gaze to his father.

"Katrin Moe may have turned on the gas with her own hand," Shayne said angrily, "but she was forced into it by something, or someone. I want to know where all of you were last night. What you were doing."

"I was out," Eddie said sullenly. "I didn't come home until two o'clock and the cops said Katrin was dead by that time."

"Where were you until two o'clock?"

"Different places," Eddie mumbled. "At the Laurel Club most of the time."

"Eddie," Lomax said, reproachfully.

"That's the only place in town where I'm

welcome with my dough. Dan Trueman's a good guy and he don't care if I'm always broke. He'll tell you I was there last night. He was talking to Neal in the driveway outside when I left his club at two o'clock."

"But Neal drove Clarice to the Country Club dance," said Mr. Lomax helplessly.

"That's what you think," Eddie said, ignoring his sister's angry glance.

"Is this true, Clarice?" Lomax asked.

She laughed shrilly. "Sure I dropped by the Laurel Club. The dance was icky."

"I'll have a talk with Neal," Lomax said shortly.

"I'm sure it wasn't Neal's fault," his wife said calmly. "He's just the chauffeur and has to drive where he's told."

"You're so mercilessly Victorian, Dad," Clarice laughed mockingly. She smoothed her skirt over her slim hips and stretched her torso upward, glancing at the detective.

"I'm sure Mr. Shayne finds this discussion just too, too interesting."

"I'm learning a lot," Shayne's voice was grim. He turned to his host. "Were you and Mrs. Lomax home last night?"

"Yes. We retired early. Mrs. Lomax was weary after her trip to Baton Rouge."

Shayne nodded.

"May I see the dressing room from which the necklace was stolen?" he asked, as he stalked away.

"Certainly."

Lomax led him to an inner door opening into a small modernistic dressing room with doors leading off to the right and left.

"My bedroom is on the left," he explained, "and the one on the right belongs to Mrs. Lomax."

CHAPTER III

NECKLACE FOR SALE



LOMAX showed Shayne the magnificent dressing table and the drawer in which his wife had carelessly placed the necklace when changing for the trip. Then he took him into his own bedroom and moved a small painting on the wall to show him the dials of a small barrel

safe.

"You can see why the loss of the necklace wasn't reported at the time of the burglary," he said. "I was in my bed reading and knew the safe hadn't been tampered with. Supposing, of course, that Mrs. Lomax had put it away before starting on her trip, I didn't look inside the safe after chasing the burglar downstairs."

Shayne nodded absently. He turned back to the dressing room.

"And your wife didn't think about having left the necklace out until this morning?"

"No. You see, she wasn't worried about it. In telling her about the robbery, I assured her the necklace was safe—because I believed it was."

He stopped Shayne with a hand on his arm as he started back into the living room, and sighed deeply.

"It's a bad business. I would prefer to drop the entire matter, Mr. Shayne. Absolve your company from all liability, if I thought—" His voice trailed off.

"If you thought you could stop the investigation that way?" Shayne asked harshly.

"So many things come up." The old man's hands trembled helplessly. "So many things that would be better left unsaid." He cleared his throat. "I've been wondering: If I should decide to waive all claim against your company, is there any way you could arrange to pay the insurance money to my wife so she'd think it came from the company?"

Shayne frowned at the bony, bloodless face before him.

"You mean you would pay us the money, to be turned over to her?"

"Yes. You see, I'm sure she wouldn't agree to dropping the matter without payment. You know how women are about such things."

"That would take some thinking over." Shayne's voice hardened. "And there's still the Katrin Moe angle. You can't buy off that investigation."

Lomax stiffened. "I hardly meant—to buy you off," he protested.

He opened the door into the sitting room. Shayne walked with him to the door.

"I'd like to talk to your chauffeur before I go," Shayne said.

"Neal's down in his workshop," Eddie said, coming forward. "I'll show you the way."

"I'll get in touch with you later," Shayne told Lomax and followed the youth out.

He picked up his coat and hat from the downstairs hallway and went with Eddie Lomax toward the rear of the house, past a large dining room and through a butler's pantry into a passageway leading out through a side door. Eddie led the way to the rear along a concrete walk, motioning to the right as they started down basement steps.

"That goes on out to Neal's apartment over the garage," he said.

He opened a door at the bottom of the steps and they entered a wide hallway lighted by a large bulb in the room beyond.

A man was working at a bench in the large roughly finished room at the end of the hall. He wore a polo shirt and soiled duck trousers and his back was to them. He had wide shoulders with muscles that flowed smoothly down to narrow hips. His head

was finely shaped, covered with close-cropped coppery hair.

He turned and regarded them quietly as the two approached. Shayne had an instant impression of ruthless strength and quiet assurance, and the impression was strengthened by the deep vibrancy of the chauffeur's voice.

"Hello, Eddie," Neal said. "Just a minute while I finish marking this piece off."

"Is that the insulating stuff?" Eddie asked. "Gee, you've got a big job, wrapping all those pipes."

"It'll cut down your father's fuel bill." Neal Jordan turned back to his work for a few minutes, then picked up a short-stemmed pipe and a can of tobacco, turned about again. "What is it, Eddie?" But he was looking at Shayne.

"This is Mr. Shayne, a detective. Watch him, Neal. He'll try to hang something on you."

Neal smiled slowly and stepped forward to shake hands.

"You can beat it, Eddie," Shayne said.

Neal Jordan filled his pipe and lit it.

"Unpleasant youngster, isn't he?" he said when Eddie went out.

The detective shrugged. He moved back to sit on a packing box. "Just how close were you and Katrin Moe?" he asked.

"I couldn't get to first base," Neal answered frankly.

"You admit you tried?"

"She was a very attractive girl—but engaged to another man."

"Did she ever discuss suicide with you?"

Neal Jordan shook his head. "She was quite reticent."

"You're well educated for a chauffeur," Shayne said.

Neal's smile broadened. "Chauffeurs aren't necessarily illiterate."

"Did you drive Mrs. Lomax night before last?"

"Yes. To a banquet in the evening and then to Baton Rouge after the banquet. She came home to change and pack a bag. About midnight."

"When did you hear about the burglary?"

"Not until we returned yesterday afternoon."

"Did you talk with Katrin yesterday?"

"I drove her downtown yesterday afternoon. Later in the evening I drove Miss Clarice to the dance."

"And to the Laurel Club later?"

DISPLEASURE wrinkled Neal's smooth features.

"Yes," he said shortly.

"Did you see Eddie there?"

"I saw him leave about two o'clock. Miss Clarice came out soon afterward and I brought her home and went to bed."

"Tell me about this morning."

"I was eating breakfast when Mr. Lomax called me up to Katrin's room. It was locked and I broke the panel so he could reach in and turn the key. I held my breath while I ran in and turned off the gas grate. We both waited at the door until the police came."

"You didn't see any suicide note?"

"There wasn't any. I watched the police search."

"Do you think Katrin committed suicide?"

"What else could it be?" The chauffeur took a turn up and down the room. "Sure, I know she was a sweet girl with everything in the world to live for. But there was a secret gnawing at Katrin Moe. Find out that secret and you'll know why she killed herself."

"You're the first person to say that," Shayne said.

Neal Jordan snorted derisively. "What do you expect of these people? To them, Katrin was efficient and tireless—the perfect servant." He paused, then added quietly, "Find out what Katrin did on her Wednesday afternoons off. She was always gone all

chairs full. He went in and found Wednesday's newspaper, turned to Page Three and read the item that had been clipped from the paper Mrs. Brown had shown him.

It was a brief account of a prison break from the State penitentiary on Tuesday. Two convicts, Anton Hodge and Raymond Gillis, had escaped by hiding inside a laundry truck and conking the driver over the head after he took them through the gates. The truck had been found later, abandoned near New Orleans.

Anton Hodge was described as twenty-eight, blond and slender, medium height, serving a seven-year term for burglary. Gillis was twenty-three, also blond, but short and heavy, serving a ten-year term for aggravated assault. Both men were described as dangerous.

Shayne went back to his car after reading the item, and drove to the Iberville address, a decrepit frame structure with a sign over the door that said:

ROOMS 50c.

He went into a dark hallway, found an old man sleeping behind a desk, and woke him.

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afternoon and was upset when she returned. Personally, I think she had another boy friend than the one she was planning to marry."

"Yesterday was Wednesday," Shayne said.

"That's right. But she didn't go off as usual yesterday. I drove to town on an errand and Katrin asked to ride with me. She stopped at a bank on the corner of Broad and Canal and then asked me if I'd take her to the depot. She stayed there only a few minutes and came back to the car and asked me"—Neal Jordan paused dramatically, gesturing with his pipe—"she asked me if I knew my way around Storyville."

Shayne frowned. "The old red-light district."

"But I don't believe she knew that, Mr. Shayne. She didn't seem to understand when I hinted it was no fit place for her. She had an address written on a piece of paper and asked me to drive along Iberville. She kept watching the street numbers and finally had me let her off at a cheap flophouse. She told me not to wait and I had other things to do, so I drove on."

Shayne got out a pencil and jotted down the address of the flophouse on Iberville Street. He thanked Neal Jordan for the information and went out.

He drove slowly back toward the city until he found a barber shop with all the

"I want some information," he said.

The old man's red-rimmed eyes became wary. The wariness turned to a gleam of avarice as Shayne got out his bill-fold. He extracted a five and held it on the desk lightly between his fingers.

"About a girl who visited someone here yesterday afternoon."

"Lotsa girls come in here. I don't ask 'em their business."

Shayne shoved the folded bill toward him. "This girl was different from the others. You remember her."

The old man's clawlike fingers closed over the bill. "Yeah, I guess I know the one you mean, mister. Stayed about twenty minutes."

"Who did she visit?"

"Look. I ain't no stoolie. A guy signs the book John Smith and that's all right by me, see? You the cops?"

"No. Private. What'd John Smith look like?"

"Sorta skinny and light hair, cut short. But he dusted out early this mornin' without leavin' no address."

"How long was he here?"

"Tuesday evenin' till this mornin'."

"Thanks, Pop," Shayne said, and went out into the drizzling cold rain. . . .

LUCY HAMILTON was powdering her nose when Shayne returned to the office

late that afternoon. She smiled at him sideways.

"How's sleuthing?" she asked.

Shayne tossed his soggy hat aside. "Punk. All I've been doing is asking questions and getting answers."

"Isn't that the way to solve a case?"

"Not my way," he told her morosely. He leaned over the low railing and ran knobby fingers through her brown curls.

"Why don't we step out tonight?"

She carefully rouged her upper lip.

"Want to buy an emerald necklace?" she asked casually.

"Don't be getting ideas just because I—"

"A man with a necklace for sale has been calling all afternoon. He wouldn't give his name. If you'd ever—" The telephone on her desk interrupted her.

"If that's the man," Shayne said, "I'll take it in the other room while you have the call traced."

He reached his desk phone in six long strides and scooped up the receiver.

"Shayne talking."

"I talked to a Mr. Horace Teton of Mutual Indemnity this morning," a softly modulated voice said. "He says you're handling the Lomax matter."

"That's right. Who's speaking?"

His caller chuckled urbanely. "Let's waive introductions, and don't bother to trace my call. The necklace is for sale."

"How much?"

"Forty grand."

Shayne laughed derisively. "You'll be lucky to get half that."

"Maybe." His telephone caller remained unruffled. "I'll call every day or so until you're ready to talk business." He hung up.

Lucy came in excitedly. "I had it traced to a public telephone in a drug-store on the corner of St. Charles and Yoydras."

"Skip it."

Shayne sat at his desk and got out the bottle of cognac and two glasses. He grinned at Lucy's disappointed face and offered her a drink.

She shook her head.

"You know I have to stay sober to earn my forty a week," she said primly.

Shayne's grin widened. "You'll never earn it by staying sober." He emptied the glass and got up. "Well, I'll see Teton and then I'll see Quinlan. I'll get some more answers that don't add up and then I'll go out and get plenty of drinks."

"Call Lieutenant Drinkley first. At the Dragon Hotel."

Shayne nodded balefully. "More poetic maundering about the sweetness of pure love."

"Sometimes I could slap you, Mike Shayne," Lucy said angrily, and went back to her desk.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAUREL CLUB



MR. HORACE TETON greeted Shayne eagerly.

"A man called this morning and hinted that he might be able to recover the necklace," he said at once. "I told him—"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "I just talked to him. Have you got that financial statement on

Lomax?"

"Called you, did he?" Teton ignored the question Shayne asked. "How much did he want for the necklace?"

"Forty grand. I told him we weren't interested."

"Wouldn't it have been smart to pretend to fall in with him? After learning his identity you could arrest him."

Shayne slammed his fist down on Teton's desk. "People like that come to me because I've always played it straight," he growled. "Give me the dope on Lomax."

"It's right here," Teton said hastily. "All assets are listed and segregated."

"Is Lomax hard up for cash?" Shayne interrupted.

"Definitely not," Teton snapped as though that were Shayne's fault. "Six months ago it might have been a different story. He was organizing this new company on a shoestring then, but these war profits are simply prodigious. Like that Jack and Heintz concern. I tell you—"

"Write a letter to the president," Shayne said, and went out.

Inspector Quinlan had the autopsy report on his desk when Shayne walked in. He shook his head.

"You're not going to like this," he said.

"Katrin Moe positively died from the inhalation of gas fumes. No trace of poison or other disorder. And your lieutenant was right, Shayne. The girl was as untouched as a baby."

"And married?" Shayne grunted. "These Norwegians."

The inspector shrugged. "Have you turned up anything?"

"Nothing but contradictions." He hesitated. "What do you know about the Laurel Club?"

"Dan Trueman's place on Chatres? He keeps his floor-shows clean enough, and if there's gambling in the back room we've never had a squawk. Trueman's smooth. No record."

Shayne nodded his thanks and went out. He drove to the Dragon Hotel on Race Street and went in. He got Drinkley's room number from the clerk and called 412. The telephone rang four times before Drinkley answered.

"I'm coming up to see you," Shayne said. "Let me come to your office," the lieutenant suggested quickly.

"I'm downstairs now," Shayne told him. He hung up and went up to the fourth floor. He had to wait a couple of minutes at the door before Drinkley let him in to the hotel bedroom. The lieutenant looked nervous and confused like a man just wakened from a deep sleep, but he didn't look sleepy. A bottle of Scotch and one of white soda stood on a desk at the end of the room with a half-filled glass beside it.

Shayne crossed to an arm chair beside the desk and shook his head when the young officer offered him a drink. He fished out a cigarette and picked up a book of matches from an ash-tray on the desk. It was an advertising folder put out by Dan True-man's Laurel Club. The ash-tray was full of half-smoked stubs. One of them still smoldered. It had lipstick on the end, as did several others.

Shayne lit his cigarette and slid the match folder in his pocket.

"I'm sorry, Drinkley," he said. "The only suicide motive I've turned up is a possible connection with the jewel theft out there."

Drinkley's thin face took on an angry flush.

"Are they accusing Katrin of that? Shayne, it's not true! There must be some other answer. I've wondered if someone has been gossiping, trying to break up our marriage."

Shayne's nostrils flared as he caught the faint odor of perfume in the room. The door to a clothes closet stood ajar, and another door, closed, evidently led to the bathroom.

"Was Clarice Lomax in love with you?" he asked abruptly.

"That brat?" Drinkley spat out the words with disgust.

Shayne shrugged. "Do you know how Katrin spent her day off? Wednesday afternoons?"

"We spent her free afternoons together when I was here. After I left, I don't know. She never mentioned anything special in her letters. Is it important?"

"I don't know." Shayne got up and went toward the closed bathroom door. "May I step in here before I go?"

He turned the knob but the door was locked on the other side.

"It's a connecting bathroom and the other occupant must be using it right now," Drinkley said quickly.

"It doesn't matter," Shayne said. He went to the outer door. "Why don't you have dinner with me this evening? I'll drop by in about an hour."

He went out without waiting for a reply.

He went swiftly down the corridor past

the elevator and around a corner, taking up a position where he could hear the door of 412 open.

HIS vigil was short. Not more than five minutes passed before a girl came out of Lieutenant Drinkley's room. She walked to the elevator and pressed the button.

Shayne turned the collar of his trench coat up, and pulled the soggy brim of his hat down. He waited until he heard the elevator stop, then sauntered around the corner in time to step in behind the girl.

She was tall and shapely, wearing a tailored suit and a green hat with a jaunty feather tucked in the brim. Her tawny hair was a shade lighter than her eyes. Her lips were red and the corners drooped sullenly. She didn't appear to notice Shayne.

He followed slowly as she went across the lobby, loitered at the door until she got in a cab and pulled away. He followed the cab a block behind in his own car, went past it when it stopped on Chartres between St. Louis and Toulouse. He saw the girl go into a canopied entrance that had a sign reading "THE LAUREL CLUB," and drove on around the corner where he parked.

He walked back and went into a small foyer with a red neon arrow pointing left to indicate the Cocktail Lounge. It was a small, intimate room with leather-upholstered stools and horseshoe seats along the wall.

He saw the tailored back of the girl who was sitting alone at one end of the bar when he looked in. He caught the eye of a waiter and jerked his head, stepped backward and got out a dollar bill as the waiter came to him.

"Do you know the babe at the end of the bar? Green hat with a feather in it?"

The waiter palmed the bill and grinned knowingly.

"Name's Lana Moore. She hangs out here some."

"A hustler?"

"No-o-o. But she don't turn down any drinks—and I reckon she might spend an evening with a gentleman if he didn't mind spending something else."

"You've earned a buck," Shayne said.

He went to a telephone booth in the small lobby and called his office. Lucy answered.

"What are you doing this evening?" he asked her.

"You said something about stepping out." She sounded expectant.

"Go home right now and pretty up," Shayne directed her. "Go to the Dragon Hotel in about an hour and tell Lieutenant Drinkley I've been detained and you're keeping the dinner date for me. Take him some place where the lights are low and the

drinks are strong. Play up to him and see what happens."

"Lieutenant Drinkley? You're crazy, Michael. He won't look at me. He was so in love with that girl he couldn't see straight."

"I know," Shayne said bitterly. "I fell for that line this morning too. Go ahead and see what happens."

He hung up before Lucy could argue further. He checked his coat and hat and went back into the cocktail lounge. Lana Moore still sat alone at the end of the bar. He slid onto the stool beside her.

"Hello, Beautiful," he said.

She gave him a sidelong look. The corners of her mouth tilted up into a smile.

"Thanks," she said in a deep, throaty voice. There was an old-fashioned glass in front of her.

"Two side-cars," Shayne said to the sleekly blond bartender. He told Lana, "I hate to drink alone."

She laughed softly. "A redhead like you shouldn't have to."

They moved to one of the horseshoe seats along the wall and had a lot of side-cars. Lana told him she sort of went for redheads and that she wasn't busy that evening. He told her he was a stranger in town with money to spend and he would like to take a fling if she could show him the works. She assured him she could and would.

She was an interesting, intelligent talker. She showed flashes of hardness but kept it pretty well concealed. By the time they went into the dining room for dinner she was calling him "Red" and letting her fingers linger against his when they touched accidentally. By the time they finished dinner she was admitting frankly that she worked for the Laurel Club on a percentage and that it was a living.

"But you don't have to gamble, Red," she told him. "I sort of go for you, if you know what I mean." Her voice was a trifle slurred.

"Sometimes I get lucky," Shayne said. "Let's see if tonight's one of those times."

"I'll get my percentage if you lose," she said candidly, and snuggled her hand under his arm to lead him back along a circuitous route to the gaming rooms in the rear where a crap table and roulette wheel, three black-jack tables and a four-five-six game were all getting a fair play from a quiet and well-mannered group of men and women.

SHAYNE bought a fifty-dollar stack of chips and edged into the four-five-six game. A fat man had the bank with a couple of hundred in front of him. Shayne covered ten of it and waited for his turn with the three dice. He rolled a four-five-six which brought the dice and the bank to him after that play was ended. He added another hundred to the sixty in front of him and grinned reassuringly at Lana who pressed close beside him.

When he was faded around the board, he rolled a five for his point and passed the dice on. When they returned to him he had a little over two hundred dollars. He rolled out a natural when he was again faded, a pair of deuces with a six.

As he watched the chips come in he heard a smooth and softly-modulated voice at his elbow say:

"Good evening, Miss Moore."

Shayne instantly recognized the distinctive voice of the man who had spoken to him over the telephone, offering to sell him the emerald necklace. He turned to see the speaker.

"Hello, Mr. Trueman," Lana replied.

The proprietor of the Laurel Club was a tall, spare man in his early forties. He looked more like a successful lawyer than a gambler. He nodded pleasantly to Lana and passed on to another table.

Shayne shook the three dice in the cup and watched Dan Trueman's spare frame go out of the room through a side door.

[Turn page]

SEEING-BELIEVING

THIRST-RELIEVING

What happens when you look at the circles and move your head from side to side?



The circles spin like a wheel.



He rolled the dice again and they stopped on a straight four-five-six.

He waited until his winnings were gathered in, then impassively announced:

"The bank passes."

He paid no heed to the low murmurs of protest around the table, turned away and cashed his chips for bills. Then he grinned down into Lana's face.

"It looks as though I'll have to pay your percentage tonight," he said.

She laughed happily. "You're the first man I ever saw quit a winner."

Shayne moved away from the table.

"Wait for me in the cocktail lounge," he muttered. "Which way—"

She squeezed his arm and released it. "Right through that side door. Men to the left." She gave him an amused smile.

She went back out the front door and Shayne went out through the same door he had seen Dan Trueman pass through.

It opened into a narrow hallway with rest rooms in either direction. Shayne opened another door straight ahead and found himself in a small barroom filled with men and thick tobacco smoke. A small door at the right of the bar said "PRIVATE" on the

"Take him out, boys," Trueman said.

The two gunmen straightened and turned toward Shayne who didn't look at them.

"I'm Shayne," he told Trueman.

Dan Trueman's lips tightened.

"Skip it, boys," he said. "Go out and tell Tige to throw those knucks away if he can't use them." He waited until the door was closed, then said softly, "I've heard of you. Shayne. What's on your mind?"

"Emeralds."

"Is it a disease?"

"You tried to sell me a necklace this afternoon."

Trueman shook his head. "Come again. I'm not a jeweler."

Shayne grinned, but his eyes were cold. "Maybe you're handling the deal for another party."

"What would I tell him if I were?"

"Just this. He'd better get out from under. I'm going to light a fire and somebody is going to get burned. There'll be no buy."

"No?" Trueman purred. "An insurance company hates to put out, say, a hundred and twenty-five grand for something they can buy for forty. If I knew the party I'd advise him to hold on."

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upper panel. A big man with a pock-marked face leaned against it.

"Lost somethin'?" he asked in a surly tone when Shayne approached him.

"I want to see the boss."

"He's busy. You'll hafta wait."

"I'm going in," Shayne said, and made a forward motion.

THE big man's eyes glittered. He shoved Shayne back with his left hand while he got a pair of brass knucks from his pocket.

Shayne hit him on the square bottom of his chin. He staggered backward, swung the knucks ponderously. Shayne stepped back and hit him again on the side of the jaw. Shayne waited until the fellow was flat, then stepped over him and opened the door.

Two slender young men stood leaning forward with their palms flat on a desk, listening to Dan Trueman who sat behind it facing the door. Trueman took a cigar from his mouth and looked at Shayne in mild surprise. The two punks turned their heads without any other motion. They were pale, and had cold, beady eyes.

"How did you get Tige to let you in?" Trueman asked.

"I persuaded him." Shayne blew on his bruised knuckles.

Shayne's laugh was sour. "Not this time. We've got a legal out if we're forced to take it. Negligence of the insured. Lomax admits he's got no claim. That's why there'll be no fix this time."

"Why bring this story to me?"

"I don't like misunderstandings about a thing like this," Shayne said. "I don't know what your interest in those emeralds is—yet—but I'll find out. But I do know you're out on a limb and I'm going to saw it off."

"Are you through talking?" Dan Trueman bared his teeth.

"That's all I've got to say."

Shayne turned as the door opened. Tige filled the doorway with a pair of young torpedoes behind him.

"Let the boys handle this, Tige," Trueman said sharply.

Tige looked disappointed but stepped aside. Trueman followed Shayne to the door.

"Dump him out on the sidewalk, boys!" he lifted his voice to say loudly. "Don't come back to the Laurel Club, Shayne, unless you can afford to lose your three dollars and fifty cents."

"All right, Trueman," Shayne said. "I'll go without any trouble this time. But if I come back it'll be different."

CHAPTER V

ONE ON THE KNOB



UNSELS followed Shayne side by side, gun-hands bulging their pockets. They were the target of amused glances from men lining the small bar.

Shayne went straight through the foyer and out the front door.

He stopped abruptly on the threshold and took a quick backward step between the lads, slapping a big palm on the outside of each punk's head and driving them together with enough force to knock them dizzy.

As they stumbled forward, he wrested gun-hands from their pockets and twisted a pair of .32 automatics from them. He went in to the cocktail lounge, found Lana waiting for him near the door, and took her arm.

"Maybe we'd better celebrate somewhere else," he said.

Her tawny eyes brooded at him for a moment, then she smiled and slid her hand under his arm.

"Maybe you'd like to take me home, Red."

He got his hat and coat and led her around to his car. He helped her into the front seat and went around to get in under the wheel. She turned her face to him and put her palms on each side of his face. Her lips opened as she pressed them against his mouth. She sighed deeply when she let him go and relaxed away from him. She gave him the address of a nearby apartment house and he started the motor.

Neither of them said anything when he stopped at the curb. She got out and waited for him, and they went through an empty lobby to a self-service elevator. She pressed the four-floor button and shivered.

"Let's get drunk, Red," she said thickly.

He grinned and warned her, "I don't get drunk easy."

The door opened directly into the living room of her apartment, and an open door on the left showed a bedroom. She tossed her hat on a chair and went across to a large combination radio-phonograph and home-recording machine in one corner.

"I'll get some soft music," she said over her shoulder, and twisted the dials.

His eyes narrowed as he saw her pick something up from on top of the machine and thrust it under her coat. He got in front of her as she started hastily toward the bedroom, and held out his hand.

"Let's see it, Lana." Her voice was grim.

She hesitated, then laughed shakily. "All right, if you're going to be like that." She handed him a small framed photograph of Lieutenant Drinkley in a sergeant's uni-

form. It was inscribed, "To my darling Lana."

"All right," Shayne said. "Let's quit kidding each other. You know I was in Drinkley's hotel room this afternoon, don't you? You heard my voice through the bathroom door and you must have recognized me when I spoke to you at the Laurel Club. Heck, I know it wasn't my fatal charm."

Her eyes were cold and very yellow. "All right. So I recognized you, Mike Shayne. Ted Drinkley told me you were a detective investigating that girl's suicide and he didn't want you to know about me."

"Go ahead and mix a couple of drinks," Shayne said.

He stepped aside to let her go into the bedroom.

He went over to the radio, set the photograph back on top. He opened a door of the cabinet and saw a small microphone for home use and a stack of records, some of which were blanks for recording.

He was looking morosely at Drinkley's photograph when Lana came from the kitchen with a tray of drinks. She moved a small table in front of two deep chairs and set the tray on it.

"Come on, Red!" she called to him. "We were going to get drunk. Remember."

He sat down and took one of the drinks. "How long have you known Drinkley?"

"About a year. What's he worried about, Red? I don't think he really loved that Katrin."

"Did he love you?"

"He did—a year ago."

"Before he met Katrin Moe?"

"Yes." Lana met his gaze levelly. "He will again, with her out of the way." Her voice had a vicious sound.

"You're crazy about him, aren't you?"

"That's a fine thing to say. After the way I've carried on with you tonight. No fooling. Red hair does things to me."

Shayne made an impatient gesture. "You admitted you were just leading me on—to find out how much I knew about you and Drinkley."

"That's the way it started," she admitted throatily. She reached out and tangled her fingers in his hair. "But you got under my skin. Let's forget Ted and get drunk together. Relax." She lifted her glass and drank deeply.

Shayne leaned forward and looked into Lana's tawny eyes. He felt a cold draft on the back of his neck.

"Did you murder Katrin Moe?" he asked her gravely.

Her eyes dilated and her fingers tightened convulsively in his hair.

"I thought she killed herself!" she said.

"A lot of people think so. But Lieutenant Drinkley knows it wasn't suicide."

Don't you see that's why he's worried, Lana? This love affair with you gives him a motive."

Shayne sensed rather than heard movement behind him. He turned in time to see a man's arm swinging downward but not in time to dodge the crushing blow.

Lana screamed and lurched against Shayne, burying her head in his stomach as sickening pain struck just above his right ear.

He doubled forward over her and fell sideward to the floor. . . .

A BAR of sunlight lay across Shayne's face when he opened his eyes again. He turned and was aware of soggy, matted blood on the rug beneath him. The chair and small table were overturned and the entire room was in disorder. Pain throbbed through his head when he pulled himself up to a sitting position and opened his eyes wide.

He saw Lana lying just inside the bedroom door. Her feet and legs were bare and a blue silk nightgown was twisted about her body.

From where he sat she looked dead.

He set his teeth and inched himself across the floor toward her. Her body was warm. He pulled the nightgown away from her face and heard regular breathing, smelled the reek of stale liquor.

He dragged himself up and looked around, to discover a rear door in the bedroom standing open. It led out to a fire-escape and he remembered the cold draft he had felt last night just before he was attacked. His assailant must have entered that way.

He pulled a blanket from the bed and spread it over Lana, then stumbled into the bathroom, stripped off his shirt, and went to work with cold water. There was a big lump above his right ear and the wound had bled a lot. He got the dried blood washed away and went into the kitchen where he found half a quart of gin. He drank from the bottle until it gagged him, but he felt steadier.

He went into the bedroom and began pulling out bureau drawers. He didn't know exactly what he hoped to find, but knew he would recognize it when he did. It was tucked behind a tiny mirror in one of the handbags in a bottom drawer.

The telegram had been sent from Miami, Florida, and was dated the preceding Monday. It said:

LETTER RECEIVED. WILL SEE YOU WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

TED.

He found his coat and hat in the living room. The guns he had taken from True-

man's punks were not in his coat pockets.

He went down in the elevator to his car and drove to Carondelet where he maintained a three-room walk-up apartment in a remodeled old residence.

A man was waiting for him at the head of the stairs; a florid man with a broad face and sleepy eyes.

"You Shayne?" he asked.

"That's right." Shayne put his key in the lock and turned to look at a city detective's badge. "Is this a pinch?"

"Quinlan wants you at Headquarters. I been waiting."

Shayne hesitated. "I've had a tough night." He touched the lump above his ear and rubbed his bristly chin. "How's for a chance to shave and clean up first?"

"Don't see why not." The detective followed him in. "My name's Greetin. No hard feelin's, huh?"

"Gosh no. You've got a job to do."

Shayne went into the small bathroom off the high-ceilinged living room and stripped off his clothes. He shaved swiftly and then showered. It was not more than half an hour later when he went down with the detective and drove to Police Headquarters.

Inspector Quinlan was alone in his office. He turned cold blue eyes on Greetin and said, "It took you long enough," when they walked in together.

"Shayne just this minute got home," Greetin told him.

"That's right, Inspector," Shayne said. "He hustled me right down." He sat down and lit a cigarette. "How official is this?"

"Homicide. We can talk off the record or I'll have a transcript made. Or you can refuse to answer without counsel."

"Who's been bumped off now?"

"Dan Trueman."

Shayne frowned at Quinlan's stony face. "I'll talk for the record," he said bluntly.

Quinlan pressed a button and presently a gray-haired man limped in with a short-hand notebook. Shayne grinned wryly.

"Michael Shayne—thirty-nine—private detective," he droned. "Take it, Inspector."

"Where were you last night?"

Shayne settled back and began an easy recital of his movements from the time he picked up Lana Moore at the Laurel Club. He told the truth, including Lana's relationship with Drinkley.

"I woke up half an hour ago in her apartment," he ended. "She's passed out on the floor and I left her lying there."

"Is that everything?"

"I did have a little argument with Dan Trueman. But that ties in with a job I'm on and I'll have to hold out on it."

"The Lomax job?" Quinlan asked, too casually.

Shayne glanced at the gray-haired man.

"That's all for the record. I'll sign a typed copy."

Quinlan consulted a notebook and read from it:

"I'll go without any trouble this time. But if I come back it'll be different."

Shayne grimaced. "Did you have a dictaphone planted?"

"Witnesses heard you threaten him. And we know it wasn't a gambling beef because you won nearly a grand with the dice. Feel like telling me why you went back and beat Trueman to death?"

"I've got an alibi. Get hold of Lana Moore."

QUINLAN flipped a switch on his desk and spoke into a mouthpiece. He gave Lana's address.

"Bring her in," he said. "Don't tell her anything and look over her apartment while you're there."

Shayne ground his cigarette out. "When was Trueman killed?" he asked.

"About two-thirty. You'd pulled his boys' fangs earlier so you didn't have much trouble when you went back and knocked them out later. There was a rough-and-tumble in Trueman's office and his killer *might* be banged up about like you are. I'm giving it to you straight, Shayne. It looks like the kind of job you might do. Maybe it wasn't murder. Maybe you had plenty good reason for going back and tangleing with him. If you can turn it into self-defense, go to it." Quinlan shrugged and took a cigar from his vest pocket.

Shayne did a lot of fast thinking. Quinlan was honest and square, but he was a cop. Everything depended on Lana. Her alibi for him would fix things if she hadn't passed out too soon after he was slugged. Quinlan might disbelieve her, but he couldn't disregard an alibi. He would have to release Shayne whether he liked it or not. And the detective had an idea all he needed now to crack the whole case wide open was a few hours. Dan Trueman's death threw a new slant on the business.

He was astounded when he was jerked from his reverie by a trim young detective reporting:

"We have Miss Moore outside, sir."

"Bring her in," Quinlan said.

Shayne stared disbelievingly when Lana was ushered in. She didn't look like the girl he had left passed out on her bedroom floor not more than an hour previously. Her cheeks were pale and her eyes had a yellowish tinge, but she was entirely self-possessed and she gave him merely a casual glance.

"What's this ail about?" she asked the inspector.

"Do you know this man?"

She glanced at Shayne again and her red lips curled with disdain.

"Hello, Red. Sure I know him."

"Can you tell us where he was at two o'clock this morning?"

Lana opened her eyes wide and lifted long lashes. She lowered them demurely.

"I don't know what kind of a girl you think I am," she protested in a throbbing, husky voice. "I had a date with him last night, sure. But it wasn't *that* kind of a date. He went home before midnight."

Quinlan's cold blue eyes didn't leave her face.

"Will you swear to that, Miss Moore?"

"On a stack of Bibles," she said.

She didn't look at Shayne.

Quinlan waved the detective back to his chair as Shayne started up with a muttered curse.

"I'll do the talking," Quinlan said curtly.

CHAPTER VI

LIGHT FROM A PILOT LIGHT



CONSCIENTIOUSLY thorough was the inspector, in his interrogation of the girl. He went over Lana Moore's story of the evening step by step. It coincided with Shayne's account up to the moment he was struck down. She calmly insisted that nothing like that had happened,

that she had sent him away after having one drink with him in her apartment.

"She's lying," Shayne said strongly when Quinlan looked at him with raised eyebrows. "Get the man who picked her up. Ask him what shape he found her in—what the apartment looked like."

The detective's testimony didn't help Shayne's story. When he had arrived at the apartment he had found Miss Moore wearing a dressing gown, drinking coffee and reading the morning paper. The apartment appeared to be in good order and there were no indications of a struggle such as Shayne had described.

The inspector thanked Lana Moore for her help and asked her to hold herself available for further questioning. When she went out he looked at Shayne quizzically.

"It's a blasted frame-up!" Shayne told him angrily. "She could have been possuming when I left, and then flown around straightening herself and the apartment up. It looks as though she knew . . . Wait a minute. How much of the story was in this morning's paper?"

"All of it. A reporter happened to hear you threaten Trueman when you were thrown out. He gave us the lead that started us looking for you, and naturally

he printed it all in his story."

"There you are. That's how she knew what was up. She knew I'd need her alibi and deliberately fixed things to queer me."

"Why would she want to frame you?"

"Blamed if I know—yet," Shayne admitted honestly. "There's her tie-up with Drinkley—and I know the lieutenant came to New Orleans to see her Wednesday night, instead of arriving Thursday morning as he claims. If either one of them are mixed up in Katrin's murder it might seem like a good idea to put me on the spot."

"Are you still calling Katrin Moe's suicide a murder?"

"I'm sure of it now—since Trueman's death," Shayne told him. "They have to tie in together, after what Trueman said to me on the phone before I knew who he was and braced him."

"I've been waiting to hear you say that." Quinlan's voice was hard. "Maybe I've got an idea of what that telephone conversation with you was about." He got an envelope from his desk drawer and emptied out a single small emerald. "This was on the floor of Trueman's office."

Shayne's eyes glittered. He picked up the small gem and studied it.

"So he had it there in his office all the time?" he muttered.

"I think you'd better start talking," Quinlan said.

"All right. When Trueman phoned me yesterday it was to offer to return the necklace for forty grand. I laughed at him. I didn't know who he was until I recognized his voice at the club last night. I went in his office to put him straight that there'd be no buy on this deal. He denied all knowledge of the necklace, of course."

"So you went back for it later?"

"I swear I didn't!" Trenches deepened in Shayne's gaunt cheeks. "But I've got an idea who did. And if you hold me here you'll end up with two unsolved murders on your hands."

"Two? Still harping on the Moe suicide?"

Shayne set his teeth together to control his anger.

"Will you make a deal with me?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know. Let's have it."

"If I can give you a motive for Katrin's murder—show you how she *could* have been murdered—and then show you that her murderer must have also bumped Dan Trueman, will you let me go and give me a chance to prove it?"

Inspector Quinlan studied him for a long time. Then he nodded slowly. "You're on. But you'll have to sell me."

"I will," Shayne said, with greater confidence than he felt.

He lit a cigarette and settled back to relate all the facts he had dug up.

When he concluded, Quinlan demanded:

"What was Katrin's connection with the escaped convict she visited Wednesday afternoon? Did he steal the necklace? Maybe she fingered it for him, or passed it on to him. And the affair between her fiancé and Lana Moore is another reason why she might have committed suicide. Why, Shayne, all you've done is furnish a couple of motives for the girl to have killed herself."

Shayne shook his head doggedly. "Here's why Katrin *had* to be murdered Wednesday night."

He carefully outlined the nebulous theory he had been laboriously building ever since his first visit to the Lomax house.

"And after the murderer found out Trueman was dickering to sell the necklace back to the insurance company, he *had* to be killed too," he ended persuasively. "I don't know yet how he learned about that, but I'll find out."

"It's a plausible theory," Quinlan said gravely. "But *how* was the Moe's girl's murder done, Shayne? You can't get away from the locked door and the P.M."

SHAYNE leaned forward, and his eyes were very bright.

"I think I can. We knew Katrin locked her door and went to bed early. It was a cold night, and let's suppose she likes her room a little warmer than the hot-air system keeps it. So she goes to sleep with her grate burning. Sometime during the night her grate goes out. Later, the flow of gas starts again, mixing slowly with the humidified air coming up from the furnace. The cold-air outlet carries the bulk of the gas out, so it mixes only slowly, but insidiously with the air in the room. She breathes it in her sleep and is numbed. So she drifts gradually into deeper sleep and then into death. Does that add up?"

Inspector Quinlan got up and paced up and down the office.

"It could hardly happen accidentally," he muttered. "I think most houses have an automatic shut-off valve for such contingencies. And if the gas was turned off during the night and then turned on again, all the other appliances burning in the house would have had to be relit. The pilot lights on the kitchen stove and furnace—hot-water heater if there is one."

"That's right," Shayne said grimly, "and it narrows the suspects down to those persons who had access to all the pilot lights, and knowledge of the gas lines and valves in the basement. And the devil of it is, the same motive fits them all. That's why I've been moving slowly, and why I need

time and freedom to investigate. We need direct evidence against one of them. Are you sold?"

Quinlan sat down heavily. He picked up a fountain pen and toyed with it.

"You'll have to prove that Katrin went to bed with her gas burning—or that she was in the habit of doing that."

"That's right. The housekeeper should know," Shayne got up. "Will you keep hands off until I've had a chance to use my own methods? I'm not hampered by official regulations, you know," he ended sourly.

"Don't tell me what you're going to do," Quinlan said hastily. "Probably be better if I don't know."

"That," said Shayne with satisfaction, "is the way I like to work."

He got up and hurried from the office. . . .

Shayne parked in front of the Lomax house, but walked around to the side and went up outside wooden stairs to the chauffeur's apartment above the garage. He knocked, then tried the door when he got no response. It opened and he went into a neat living room, with a small bedroom beyond.

When he didn't see what he wanted in

turned on down here." He led Shayne to a two-inch main entering through the wall and showed him a metallic seal on the cut-off. "That has to be broken to turn it back on."

Shayne ran his gaze along the main. "I suppose there's a main valve this side of the cut-off?"

"Right here."

Neal showed him a brass valve at a point in the main where a tee connection led off to the furnace.

Shayne tugged at the lobe of his left ear. "That cuts off all the gas in the house," he reasoned. "If it was turned off temporarily and then turned on again all the pilot lights would have to be relit."

"That's right. The furnace, water heater and kitchen range."

"I know it's easy to relight the pilot on a stove," Shayne said, "but isn't the furnace more complicated?"

"It's simple if you know how." Neal went around in front of the furnace and opened a narrow door, showed Shayne the pilot light flickering inside. "That burns all the time, and the furnace heat is controlled by a thermostat upstairs. The only real pre-

Next Month: DEATH ON THE METER, a Novelet by Edward Ronns

the living room, he went on into the bedroom and found a framed photograph of Neal Jordan on the dresser. It was a good likeness, and small enough to slide into his coat pocket. He pocketed it and went out and down the steps to the basement door Eddie Lomax had showed him the previous day.

The door to the furnace room was open and he went past a squat gas furnace with a dozen or more big hot-air pipes rising from the top of it like grotesque arms, twisting upward to carry clean washed air to each room.

The galvanized air-conditioner stood next to the furnace which had a new coating of the insulating material Neal had been working on the day before. Some of the hot-air pipes were also newly insulated, while others were uncoated save for a thick layer of dust.

Neal Jordan was near the end of the furnace room fitting a strip of insulation around a pipe over his head. He turned and smiled recognition at Shayne.

"Just a minute until I get this wire twisted," he said.

Shayne lit a cigarette and waited. When Neal turned to him, he explained:

"I want to check up on the gas system here. If anything interrupts the flow of gas, what happens?"

"There's an automatic cut-off that prevents it from starting again until it's

caution in lighting the pilot is to see the main valve is off first."

"Show me," Shayne said, in a preoccupied tone.

NEAL showed him a large valve in the one-inch line leading into the furnace. "That's the main valve. This smaller line feeds the pilot light and has its own valve. When I shut it, the pilot goes out."

He turned the small valve and the flickering light went out.

"It's out now," Neal explained, "as it would be if that main valve by the wall had been shut off. To relight it, you would first shut off this main valve here."

He closed the one-inch line and picked up a length of flexible tubing with a long metal tip connected to the pilot feed-line with a valve of its own above the pilot shut-off.

"This is just a convenient torch for reaching inside and lighting the pilot," Neal further explained. "You could do the same thing with a long twist of paper."

He turned gas into the flexible tube and struck a match to the metal end. A flame flared out and burned steadily. He put the metal tip inside the furnace and opened the pilot valve. He withdrew the tube when the pilot light caught, and turned it off. He then opened the main valve into the furnace and turned to Shayne with a smile.

"That's all there is to it. Not nearly as

complicated as most people think."

Shayne had watched every movement with intense concentration.

"I wonder how many people in this house know how to relight it though."

"Mr. Lomax. And Eddie, I presume. Mrs. Brown, perhaps, though most women are afraid to fool with gas appliances."

"Thanks for the demonstration," Shayne said, and went out and around to the front of the house.

The maid told him Mr. Lomax was not at home but that Mrs. Lomax and the son and daughter were upstairs.

Shayne told her not to announce him, and went up the stairs.

He found the three of them in the upstairs sitting room. Eddie scowled at him.

"I thought they had you in the clink for killing Dan Trueman," he muttered.

Shayne paid no attention to him.

"I need to clear up a couple of things," he told Mrs. Lomax. "Did any of you have your gas grates burning Wednesday night?"

"Neither Mr. Lomax nor I did," she said languidly. "I don't know about the children or the servants."

Both Clarice and Eddie shook their heads.

"Do any of you know if Katrin ever let her grate burn all night?"

There was a short silence. Then Mrs. Lomax said decisively:

"Definitely not. Katrin never used the gas grate in her room. She often complained about the house being too warm, and she disliked the odor of burning gas."

Shayne's shaggy red brows twitched. "You mean her grate was never lighted?"

"That's right," Clarice chimed in. "She always got a headache if she stayed very long in a room where the grate was on."

Shayne drew in a long, uneven breath. This information knocked the props from under the elaborate murder theory he had told Quinlan. He tugged at his left earlobe while the trio watched him in silence.

"I'll check with Mrs. Brown," he said, as he turned away. "And if you're lying—"

He started to the door, and turned. "Sorry I missed your husband, Mrs. Lomax," he said, "but you might tell him that some man of mystery has been calling on the phone offering to sell the insurance company the stolen emerald necklace. The company won't deal." Then, with his hand on the door, he abruptly demanded: "What hotel do you stop at in Baton Rouge, Mrs. Lomax?"

"Why—" Her eyes blazed, and she clamped her lips together.

"The Victoria, Mother," Clarice reminded her. "I've often heard you say that's the only decent hotel there."

CHAPTER VII

ON A HUNCH



SHAYNE left Mrs. Lomax and her son and daughter, and went downstairs. He found Mrs. Brown in the kitchen.

"Who gets up first around here?" he asked her.

"And who would that be but me?" she demanded.

"How about Neal? Does he

ever get in before you?"

"There's no way for him to get in until I unlock the door."

"I thought he might have an extra key," Shayne murmured.

"Not him, with Mr. Lomax thinkin' it's not seemly for a bachelor-man to have the run of the house at night." Mrs. Brown sniffed her disdain. "Though he'd better lock his own son out, I'm thinkin'."

Shayne slid over that angle. "Did you have any trouble with your gas range yesterday morning—the morning Katrin was found dead?"

She thought a moment, then shook her head decidedly.

"You're certain the pilot light wasn't out? There wasn't any odor of escaped gas in the kitchen?"

"Lord, no. Wouldn't I remember a thing like that?"

"All right," Shayne said. "This is very important. Did Katrin Moe have her gas grate burning when you left her room that last night?"

Again he got a decided shake of the housekeeper's gray head.

"You can be sure she didn't," Mrs. Brown said positively. "To my certain knowledge it was never lit, with her hatin' the smell of burnin' gas. Like poison it was to her."

Shayne studied her kindly, good-natured face for a long moment, then grinned ruefully and went out. That shot his murder theory all to pieces. He was glad he hadn't brought Quinlan along. All he could do now was to go on as he had planned and hope for some kind of a break. If he didn't produce some kind of results Quinlan still had a murder rap waiting for one Michael Shayne. . . .

Lucy Hamilton jumped up and stared at Shayne with terrified eyes when he strode into the office.

"What kind of trouble are you in, Michael?" she demanded anxiously. "The police—"

He stopped in front of her on widespread legs and ticked items off on his big-knuckled fingers.

"First: Get hold of Alex Lane—he's a private dick. Tell him to come running. Then put a call through to the warden at

the state pen. While you're waiting for that, call the Victoria Hotel in Baton Rouge and find out whether Mrs. Norton Lomax was registered there Tuesday night, and if not, whether they had any vacancies."

Lucy sank back, scribbling in her notebook. She looked up with another question on her lips, but Shayne went in to his inner office. She compressed her lips and picked up the phone book.

Shayne poured a long drink of cognac and downed it slowly. He refilled his glass and sat in the swivel chair as Lucy came in. She glanced at her notebook.

"Mr. Lane is on his way over," she reported. "Long distance is putting the other two calls through." Her eyes rested on Shayne's bruised face and the lump on his head. "Michael! Is it true what the papers say about you and Dan Trueman?"

"It's grossly exaggerated." He took a sip of cognac. "What time did you leave Drinkley last night?"

"About nine. And you were mistaken. He hardly looked at me. He was really and truly in love with Katrin."

Shayne winced. "If you'd kept him busy until midnight," he said, "I might not have this." He touched the lump on his head.

A wizened little man with big ears came trotting into the office. He grinned at Shayne.

"It's been a lot of years, Mike," he said.

Shayne shook hands with "Gabby" Lane and poured another drink.

"Read the morning paper?"

Gabby took the drink and nodded.

"Then you know the spot I'm in," said Shayne. "We've got to work fast. I need a couple of witnesses who saw a certain party hanging around the Laurel Club at two this morning."

Gabby considered briefly. "It'll cost dough."

"It's got to look right without me showing. Fix it so the cops think they discovered the witnesses who saw the certain party. His picture was in yesterday's paper in the Lomax thing. Their chauffeur. And here's a good picture of him so there won't be a mistake in the line-up." Shayne pulled the photograph of Neal Jordan from his pocket. "Let them study that first, but they make their official investigations from the news photo. Can do?"

Gabby nodded. "Five Cs."

"Perjury has gone up since I was here," Shayne said bitterly. "Okay. But make it fast."

He followed Gabby out and surprised a look of violent aversion on Lucy's face.

"I thought you were a detective," she said bitterly. "I didn't know you went around framing people to save your own hide."

She yanked a drawer open, got out her purse, and began stuffing in personal belongings.

"You eavesdropped," Shayne accused her.

"I couldn't help hearing. You think you can buy anything, but you can't buy me. Not for forty dollars a week."

SHE rammed an absurd little hat down on her brown curls and started up. Shayne stayed in front of her.

"Don't walk out on me," he said.

"I certainly am walking out. I'm not going to—"

He pushed her back. His voice hardened. "You're going to listen first. I've got a murder frame around my neck. If I don't give Quinlan another suspect fast he'll slap me in jail and two murders will never be solved. I won't lie to you. I don't know whether or not Jordan is guilty. I thought I knew, but a beautiful theory exploded in my face half an hour ago. But I can't stop. I've got to give the inspector someone to work on while I build up another theory."

"And they'll beat him with hoses whether he's guilty or not," Lucy protested.

"All right," Shayne said. "Maybe they'll beat him. Maybe he's innocent. But I'll have a chance to find the guilty man. And I've got a fee of twelve and a half grand riding on this case." He started to say something else, but stopped. His eyes were bleak. He turned away. "If you walk out now, don't come back. I'll send you a check for two weeks' salary."

He went on into his office and poured a drink. He felt old and tired and uncertain. If Lucy walked out on him—

His telephone rang. He waited to see if Lucy would answer it.

He was strong again and a driving tension took hold of him when she came to the door and said in a subdued voice:

"It's the warden."

"Michael Shayne in New Orleans," he said, as he lifted the phone. "I'm checking on visitors to that pair of convicts who escaped Tuesday. Is Wednesday afternoon still your regular visiting day?"

He listened a moment. "So Raymond Gillis never had any visitors?" he said. "But Anton Hodge's wife came every Wednesday afternoon? Can you describe her?"

He slowly tugged at his ear-lobe while he listened to the warden's voice give a vivid description of Katrin Moe as the person they had known as Mrs. Anton Hodge. Shayne thanked the warden and hung up.

Michael Shayne sat very still for a minute, then thrust back his chair and flung himself out the door. He threw, "Back in half an hour," at Lucy as he went past her.

In the Federal Building his private detective's badge gained him access to their rec-

ords bearing on recent naturalization proceedings.

He made several notations from the dossier on Katrin Moe before hurrying out and driving to a small savings bank on the corner of Broad and Canal.

There he interviewed two tellers before he found the one who had waited on Katrin Moe Wednesday afternoon. He remembered Katrin well and was eager to talk about her and her death.

"She always came in on Wednesdays," he told Shayne. "To deposit her weekly check, you know. I remember now she was later than usual last Wednesday. Yes. At least an hour later. And she made a large withdrawal. Large, for her, you know. She generally withheld a few dollars, but on Wednesday she drew out fifty. I remember mentioning it in a joking way and she said she was getting married and needed it for her honeymoon. Getting married the next day, you know, and—"

"Thanks," Shayne said, and broke away to drive hurriedly back to his office.

"Inspector Quinlan has been calling for you," Lucy told him hopefully when he walked in. "He said it was important. And I got the hotel in Baton Rouge. Mrs. Lomax wasn't there Tuesday night and they did have some vacancies."

"Good girl," Shayne said. He stepped close and pressed the back of his hand against her cheek momentarily. She looked up at him with tear-misted eyes. He nodded and said gently:

"Get Quinlan."

"Things are breaking faster than we hoped," Quinlan told him happily when the connection was made. "My men have picked up a couple of witnesses who saw Neal Jordan, the Lomax chauffeur, go in the side entrance to the Laurel Club about the time Trueman was killed. We're bringing him in to see if they'll identify him in a lineup."

"I'll be over to see what goes," Shayne said.

He went slowly back to the outer office.

"The wheels have started to turn," he told Lucy grimly. "Neal Jordan has been fingered for the Trueman job." He watched closely for her reaction.

"It'll be all right, Michael," she murmured. "I know it will. I'm sorry I was so horrid. It was just that I couldn't bear to think of you doing anything underhanded."

"Skip it, kid," Shayne said. He got out the notes he had made at the Federal Building. "Call the depot and get the exact times of arrivals and departures of trains for Craigville, Wisconsin. Also the exact fares, coach, first-class and Pullman. Call me at Quinlan's office as soon as you get the dope."

Lucy bent over her notebook. "Craigville, Wisconsin?"

"That's it," Shayne said, and went out.

INSPECTOR QUINLAN smiled exuberantly when Shayne entered his office.

"Jordan is being put through the lineup right now for a positive identification," he told Shayne. "Funny, the way my men picked him up right after you showed me how it could have been him. Straight police work, checking every possible witness, is what did it."

"On the Trueman killing, that is," he amended hastily. "I don't say we'd ever have solved the Moe case without your help. I suppose you checked out there and found she did have her gas burning that night—and that Jordan had access to the kitchen to relight the stove pilot?"

"I checked on it," Shayne looked around the office longingly. "You wouldn't have a drink?"

Quinlan got up and went to a filing cabinet. He opened it and got out a pint of whisky.

"Go right ahead. I never touch it while working."

Shayne pulled the cork and wolfed down a drink while the inspector answered his telephone. He handed the phone to Shayne.

"It's your office."

"Here's that train information," Lucy's voice said. "You can leave on the Flyer early in the morning or on an afternoon train for Craigville. The Flyer reaches Craigville at eleven-forty A.M. the following day, and—"

"That's good enough. What's the fare?"

"One-way coach is twenty-nine forty-three. First-class—"

"Hold it," Shayne said.

He laid the receiver down and got out his wallet, extracted the crumpled memorandum he had found in Katrin Moe's wastebasket. He checked the figures.

"Plus ten per cent tax?" he asked Lucy.

"That's right. The tax is two ninety-four on the coach."

"That's what I wanted," he said, and hung up. He took another short drink from Quinlan's bottle and looked at his watch. It was 10.25.

"Do you want to take another long shot with me?" he asked.

"I'll ride to Hades and back with you after this one you've just pulled out of the hat," the inspector told him heartily.

Shayne winced. "I can be wrong."

"I'll take a chance on you."

"Wire Craigville, Wisconsin, to meet the eleven-forty Flyer and arrest Anton Moe, brother of the late Katrin Moe."

"For what? I thought they couldn't locate her brother."

"Charge him with being an escaped convict named Anton Hodge."

Quinlan's eyes were coldly incredulous. "Are you positive?"

"No," Shayne said wearily. "It's a hunch. Suit yourself about playing it." He was getting tired of guessing.

Quinlan switched on his inter-communication system.

"It sounds cockeyed," he said, "but I'll do it on your say-so."

Shayne let it lie like that. He felt a mild pity for anyone so easily led to act on a Shayne hunch.

A cop came to the door as Quinlan finished giving his order.

"We've got Jordan here," the cop said. "I think he's ready to sing."

"Was the identification authenticated?" "Both witnesses picked him out of the line-up."

"Good enough. Bring him in."

Quinlan puffed on his cigar and glanced triumphantly at Shayne.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAYNE COMES THROUGH



NEAL JORDAN stepped into the office between two policemen. His chin was up and he looked calmly self-possessed. His glance went from Shayne to Quinlan.

"What's this hocus-pocus about?" he demanded.

"Two witnesses have placed you at the Laurel Club late last night," the inspector said. "Why did you kill Trueman?"

Jordan drew in a long breath. "So that's it. All right. I did drive Mr. Lomax there. But I didn't go in. He did."

"Wait a minute," Quinlan told one of the cops. "Get a reporter." He looked at Shayne queerly. Shayne shrugged impassively.

When the reporter was ready with his notebook, Quinlan said, "Shoot."

"I will," Jordan said, "since you've tied me into it. Lomax buzzed me a little after midnight last night. He had me drive him to the Laurel Club, and on the way down told me confidentially that Dan Trueman had called and offered to return the necklace to him for a reward. I got the impression he was afraid Eddie or Clarice had stolen it and given it to Trueman for a gambling debt and I felt sorry for him." He shrugged. "I've always felt sorry for him on account of those two."

"I parked outside and waited about half an hour. When he came out he told me he'd arranged to buy the necklace back, and asked me to keep still about the whole thing. Then this morning, after I read the paper,

he came down to the basement and said wasn't it terrible about what happened to Trueman after he left, and that's all I know about it."

"Wait outside while that statement is being typed," Quinlan said. "Gleason, you and Byrnes pick up Lomax, and bring him here." He turned and laughed heartily at the expression on Shayne's face. "Don't look so downhearted about it. You said in the beginning it might have been Lomax or Jordan or the boy who got that necklace. Putting the screws on Jordan cleared it up no matter how you look at it."

Shayne nodded glumly. "It cleared up one thing. I wondered how the killer knew Trueman had tried to dicker with me to buy the necklace back."

"If the old man turned the necklace over to Trueman in the first place, why did he kill him to get it back?" Quinlan asked.

"Have you still got that bead?" Shayne asked.

"Right here." Quinlan got the small emerald from his desk.

Shayne held it up to the light. "It's synthetic," he stated flatly. "A good job but still a phony."

Quinlan frowned disbelievingly. "But the Lomax necklace was genuine. Your company insured it for a hundred and twenty-five thousand."

"Let's let Lomax tell us about it."

Shayne got up and walked across the office with the pint bottle dangling from his fingers. He took a long drink and shook his head bleakly. Quinlan tried to draw him back into conversation on the case but he refused to discuss it further until Lomax was brought in.

The elderly manufacturer looked worried but determined when he was ushered in.

"I thought a private citizen had some constitutional rights," he began irritably. "These men dragged me here."

"A murder suspect has no rights," Quinlan said.

Lomax looked suddenly deflated. "I was afraid this would come after they arrested Neal. He told you, I suppose."

"Let's hear your story."

"Dan Trueman telephoned me shortly after midnight. He didn't tell me how he happened to get the necklace—that, I could guess, but he told me Mr. Shayne had offered forty thousand dollars for the necklace in behalf of the insurance company. As I was anxious to avoid any loss to the company because I felt the loss due to my wife's negligence, I asked Trueman to hold off until I could discuss it with him."

"Neal drove me down and the club was closed when we arrived. I went to Trueman's private office and he offered to turn the necklace over to me for fifty thousand

dollars. He insisted on cash and we were to conclude the transaction today. Trueman was in perfect health when I left him there." He threw a reproachful glance at Shayne.

Quinlan rose slowly. "So you were willing to pay him fifty thousand dollars—for a phony emerald necklace?"

"Oh?" said Lomax faintly. "So you know it was an imitation?"

"Certainly. In the struggle with Trueman the necklace broke and scattered on the floor. One of the emeralds was left behind."

SHAYNE lounged forward.

"That's why you were so anxious to get the necklace back, wasn't it?" he said. "Because if it reached the insurance company you knew we'd discover you had substituted an imitation six months ago when you needed cash?"

"Yes. But I tried to do the honest thing. I told you I'd rather pay the insurance out of my own pocket than have the company lose."

Shayne nodded. "That's what made me suspicious. I've never met a wealthy man with a conscience. Your wife didn't know about the substitution, did she?"

"No," Lomax shuddered. "It was her property, you know."

"Wait a minute," Quinlan protested angrily. "Why did Lomax steal it in the first place if he didn't want to collect insurance?"

"But of course, I didn't steal it!" Lomax protested.

"The devil you didn't. That was your motive for murdering Katrin Moe. Because she was the only person in the house who knew the necklace was in the safe in your bedroom when the house was being burglarized."

"Murdered? Katrin?" Lomax shrank back. "Oh, no! That was suicide. I saw her locked door myself—and the gas was turned on."

"Sure you did," Quinlan said in a cold, even tone. "You were even careful to have Neal there for a witness. But we know how you did it, Lomax. A twist of the wrist to shut off the gas grate after she went to sleep with it burning. Another twist of the wrist to send gas flowing back into the room after the flame was out."

"It couldn't have been that way!" Lomax panted. "Katrin never burned her gas. The odor made her sick."

Quinlan stood perfectly still for a moment. Then he turned slowly toward Shayne.

Shayne drew in a long breath. "He's right. I didn't tell you because I knew you'd lock me up when you found out that theory

was wrong." He turned quickly to Lomax. "There's just one question: Whose idea was it to put the insulating material around the hot-air pipes?"

"Neal's. He suggested it Wednesday afternoon as a measure to conserve fuel. I thought it splendid of him to offer to do the work himself."

"That's all we need," Shayne said grimly. He told Quinlan, "Bring Neal Jordan back in."

Quinlan hesitated but the look on Shayne's face checked him.

"Bring Jordan in," he told a cop in the doorway.

None of the three men said anything while they waited. Shayne took another careful drink from the bottle and set it aside. As Jordan came in, Shayne told Lomax:

"You've known all along your wife and Neal stole the necklace and murdered Katrin so she couldn't tell anyone it was locked in the safe Tuesday night, and not left in the dressing table, as Mrs. Lomax had said. You knew what was going on between your wife and Jordan. You wouldn't give her any cash because you were afraid she might run off with him—and you were sure they had stolen the necklace so they could collect the insurance."

"It seemed to me—at first—that they were taking a big chance on putting over an insurance swindle, when Mrs. Lomax could just have easily have sold her necklace in the open market," Shayne went on grimly. "But that was before I learned the gems were synthetic. You were not aware that your wife knew that, Lomax, but she did. So she had to work another scheme—one in which she could collect two ways. From the insurance company—maybe. And positively from a certain person, and she didn't care whether he got stung or not—after she got his cash."

"That was where Trueman came in. I've found out—just how, doesn't matter right now—that Mrs. Lomax owed a little matter of about five thousand dollars to Dan Trueman; a gambling debt. Probably the necklace was taken to him with the suggestion that he cancel the debt and come across with, say, ten thousand dollars, and he could sell the necklace through some underground connections that Mrs. Lomax and Jordan wouldn't know about."

"Naturally Trueman knew the value of the famous Ghorski emerald necklace, and since he must have been sure he could get rid of it for at least forty or fifty thousand, that must have looked like a swell deal to him. So he agreed. But Mrs. Lomax knew, yesterday, that someone had called me offering to sell me the necklace. I told her so myself. She didn't tell her husband she knew

that. But she knew something must be done, for she knew the man who phoned must be Trueman, and that instead of dealing with a fence, he was trying to sell the gems to the insurance company. That put an entirely different face on things."

MICHAEL SHAYNE'S eyes bored into the chauffeur.

"Wasn't that it, Jordan?"

Jordan smiled quietly. "You're doing the talking."

"That's why you had to get it back from Trueman even if you had to kill him," said Shayne. "Because you couldn't afford to let him sell it to the insurance company—not that they would have bought a phony—and you couldn't afford to let Lomax buy it back. For as soon as that happened the whole business would have had to come out in the open, and your affair with Mrs. Lomax would have gone pffft. Everything would have been for nothing—even Katrin's murder."

"Fairy tales," Jordan scoffed.

"Two witnesses place you at the Laurel Club at two o'clock this morning," Shayne reminded him. "But you and Lomax both agree you were there with him not later than one." He turned to Lomax. "Did you hear Jordan drive out later?"

"Yes. I wondered. I didn't know—"

"It was tough on you with your wife involved," Shayne said. "You knew about her and Jordan, that the trip to Baton Rouge was a phony to get away for a night together."

"Sure he did," Jordan sneered. "He had detectives on us months ago. But I don't know anything about this other stuff—the necklace and Katrin being murdered."

"You planned it when you and Mrs. Lomax returned from your pretended trip to Baton Rouge and learned about the burglary in your absence. You simply had to claim the necklace was left out Tuesday night. But Katrin knew it wasn't. So you murdered her before Mrs. Lomax pretended to discover the loss."

"Did I persuade her to go to bed and turn on the gas?"

"No," Shayne told him. "It was that new insulation on the hot-air pipes that put me wise. That and the flexible tube you used to show me how to relight the pilot light in the furnace."

Jordan's face contorted. He lunged toward the door. Shayne laughed harshly and tripped him. A policeman went on top of him and when he got up he wore a pair of handcuffs.

"So you did catch on?" he snarled. "I was afraid you were wise when you asked for that demonstration in the basement."

"I don't understand," Lomax moaned

helplessly. "My wife may have been indiscreet but I don't believe—not murder."

"I don't believe she knew what Neal planned. She may have suspected, afterward, that he murdered Katrin," Shayne turned to Quinlan. "You see how it was done? By making a small hole in the hot-air pipe near the furnace leading to Katrin's room, Neal was able to put the end of the flexible tube in and introduce a flow of gas directly into the pipe. It mixed with the hot air and entered her room gradually while she was asleep."

"But the gas grate in her locked room was turned on when they broke in the next morning," Quinlan reminded him helplessly.

Shayne shook his head. "Lomax saw Neal run into the room and reach down and pretend to shut off the grate. Actually, it was never on. He had removed his tube from the pipe in the basement and the room quickly cleared of fumes, making everyone think the grate had been on and he had turned it off. And the new insulation was to hide that small hole in her pipe in the basement, if anyone ever checked up."

"That's right," Neal Jordan laughed boastfully in the old man's face. "You made a swell witness for me, watching while I heroically braved the gas to run in and act like I was turning off the grate."

Mr. Lomax drew back from him in horror. "To think that you—that my wife could have—"

"Take him away," said Quinlan disgustedly, and he advised Lomax in a kindly tone, "Go home and think things over. I don't know what the charges will be against you and your wife, but I'll do the best I can."

His buzzer sounded just as Norton Lomax went out. He opened the connection and listened.

"A report from Craigville," he told Shayne. "Anton Moe admits escaping from the pen under the name of Hodge and that his sister Katrin gave him a ticket home. How did you figure that?"

"I added up some things—such as the price of a railroad ticket with the tax added. It came out Craigville, which happens to be the town Katrin and Anton Moe once lived in. She had been visiting him at the pen as his wife," he went on flatly. "That explains her wedding ring. He was doing time under an alias and so she wore a ring and pretended to be Mrs. Anton Hodge when she visited him, because there would be less chance of tracing her home, and maybe having her lose her job."

AT SHAYNE'S office Lucy greeted him with a worried look and the announcement: "Lieutenant Drinkley called a few minutes ago and he's suddenly decided to

leave town. I wondered if we should refund him the fifty-dollar retainer."

Shayne touched the lump behind his ear and shook his head.

"I generally manage to get paid more than that for getting knocked cold."

"Did he do that?"

"I'm pretty sure he did, after being sicked onto me by an ex-girl friend when I began asking embarrassing questions. The poor devil was about out of his head with worry," Shayne went on, "because he was afraid the gal had told Katrin lies about him and maybe caused her to commit suicide. That certain gal had a recording apparatus in her apartment and I wouldn't be surprised if she had a record of him making love to her in an off moment. Which wouldn't have been difficult."

He ended with a wry grin.

"You've still got a thousand things to tell me," Lucy complained. "Who stole the necklace, and—"

Shayne put a big hand over her mouth. "Right now I need to relax in a washtub, with six fingers of cognac. Let's close up the office and—"

"Relax," she finished for him, her eyes dancing. "Let's. I know just the place. There's even a bottle of cognac left in my apartment from the last time you were there."

"Is there a back entrance?" Shayne demanded.

"No back entrance," she assured him.

"What are we waiting for then?" he said.

She linked her arm in his and they went out of the office together.

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The startled Judge saw the hilt of a knife protruding between the cashier's shoulder-blades

PAYOFF—DEATH

By TED COUGHLAN

Judge Wayne Wright tackles a big race track swindle and proves that his judicial mind can win out against long odds!

GOOD afternoon, Judge!" Bill Fenway, young, tall, usually cheerful mutual clerk, sounded strangely strained.

Wayne Wright, the oldest judge of the Miami Criminal Court, looked up from his racing program. His kindly blue eyes lighted as he answered the greeting.

"Hello, William! Aren't you working today?"

"Same old window, Your Honor. I've been selling doubles."

The clerk glanced from the judge to the "tote" board, its electric clock showing post time for the first race. His sharp hazel eyes had a worried look, and he was frowning, running his long-fingered hands through his rumped brown hair, sizing up the crowd surging from the clubhouse veranda to the sellers' windows.

"Looking for Margaret?" the judge asked jocularly. "She's probably hanging around your window."

Fenway shook his head.

"No, but I saw your secretary a little while ago. Well, see you later, Your Honor. I have to get into my cage."

Judge Wright laid his gnarled hand on the young man's sleeve in a detaining gesture.

"What's troubling you, William?"

Fenway slumped into the chair next to the judge. He passed his hand over his eyes, then admitted in a low, tense voice:

"There's a big swindle going on inside. Tickets have been disappearing, then turning up days later, cashed the second time. I've found out who is doing it, and frankly, I'm scared stiff. I haven't time to go into it now, but . . . I wonder if I could see you this evening, sir? I'd like to have your advice."

"Why certainly, William, if you think I can help. Come to my apartment when you get to town. Now, keep it to yourself for the rest of the afternoon, and tell me what do you think of Mystery Miss in the first?"

"Still trying to hit the long shots, Judge? Well, I think you have a good one today. With Perkins up, Mystery Miss may come to life. I'll be seeing you."

He walked toward the clerks' entrance, leaving the judge still trying to make up his mind.

Finally decided, Judge Wright took out his plastic bill-fold, extracted a fifty-dollar bill, then put on his glasses again, and looked anxiously toward the clubhouse steps. Where on earth was his secretary? He had only a minute to make his bet, and his arthritic legs were no longer good for hurrying.

AT LAST he saw the familiar slim, blond Margaret Sinclair, dressed in a neat gray suit, walking toward him. Her speckled hazel eyes were shining with excitement, her curls flying in the breeze. She sat down next to him.

"Well, Margaret, where have you been?" Petulantly the judge held out the money. "I want to make a bet on the first race! Hurry!"

"Plenty of time, Your Honor. Besides it would be better if you stopped gambling. Your heart—" Margaret's high, smooth forehead wrinkled momentarily. Then, as the judge angrily tapped his cane, she held out her hand docilely. "Which nag did you choose?"

"Fifty dollars to win on Mystery Miss, please, my dear."

The judge gave her the money, and watched fondly as she started toward the sellers' windows, her skirt swishing. He

smiled, muttering to himself:

"She babies me too much, bless her heart."

Margaret Sinclair came back just as the bell rang for the start of the first race. The judge stood up, and beckoned to her.

"Hurry, my dear! We must see the race!"

Margaret pulled the sleeve of her employer's light topcoat, and made him sit down again. She reprimanded him with make-believe sharpness.

"We'll do nothing of the sort! You know the strain isn't good for your heart. Sit right here and watch the numbers." She pointed to the large tote board.

Sighing, the judge sat back.

"Where is my ticket?" he asked.

Without a word, she handed him a two-dollar show ticket and forty-eight dollars in change. The judge looked at it, frowning irritably.

"But, I told you to get me fifty dollars to win! What's the matter? Are you afraid I can't afford to lose?"

"You can well afford to lose it, Your Honor, but you can't afford to win, and you know it. Here, swallow one of these."

She opened her shoulder bag, took out a small carton, and handed him a pill.

Ignoring her outstretched palm, the judge looked at the huge black tote board. The numbers were up. At the half mile, Mystery Miss was in the lead.

"You see?" he informed her accusingly.

"I see, and it's all the more reason for you to take this. If your doctor were here, he'd make you swallow the entire box."

She took the pill between her thumb and forefinger and suddenly popped it into the judge's open mouth, as the official result was posted. Mystery Miss had weakened in the stretch and finished second.

The judge gulped, swallowed the pill.

"One would think you were my nurse and not my secretary," he remonstrated, then smiled good-naturedly as the prices went up. Mystery Miss paid nine twenty for place.

"Give me the ticket, and I'll collect for you," Margaret offered.

"Oh, no, I'll get it myself," the judge said promptly. "All you want is a chance to talk to your boy friend Bill Fenway." Then he relented. "Well, go ahead, but come back before the next race."

She shook her blond curls.

"I'll wait until he gets through cashing this race. Now, take it easy, and don't listen to every tout you meet." She smiled up at him, showing her bright, even teeth.

Judge Wright walked slowly toward the cashiers' windows. Most of them were still closed, waiting for their official payoff slips. He read the name plate in front of

Fenway's window, and seeing it open, went up, laid his ticket on the ledge.

"That girl," he commented dryly. "If she'd only bet the way I tell her to!"

There was no answer from the young cashier. Judge Wright looked in through the bars. Fenway was slumped forward on his stool, his tousled head lying on the counter. Putting on his glasses, the judge stared at him again, then backed off a step. His heart lurched. He saw the hilt of a knife protruding from between the cashier's shoulder-blades.

The bars in front of the cashier's window began to swim before his eyes. He held on to the edge of the protruding ledge for support, closed his eyes, and shook his head in an effort to shake off the giddiness. Somewhat regaining his composure, he reached his hand in under the bars, and felt for the switch which he knew would turn on the red light over the cashier's cages, and summon the track detective.

The flashing light brought a short, heavy-set man hurrying toward him. The detective pushed his straw hat back off his wrinkled forehead and boomed:

"What's the trouble? Who flashed that light?" Then, recognizing the judge, he lowered his voice respectfully. "Hello, Judge. Who wants me?"

"I do," the judge mumbled almost inaudibly, pointing to the cashier's slumped body. "Take me inside, quickly!"

THE track detective took in the situation in a hurried glance. Stopping only long enough to reach in and pull the window closed, he took the judge by the arm and led him to the employees' entrance to the mutual department.

Bill Fenway's window was the last one in the long line. The cages were separated from one another by thin partitions, shutting the mutual clerks off from one another. Unaware of what had happened, they were busy cashing the tickets on the race. None of them paid any attention as the judge, the track detective, and the mutuels' manager who had quickly been summoned, walked past them toward Fenway's cage.

They were joined by the track physician. He leaned over the cashier's body and made a hurried examination.

"There's nothing I can do," he informed. "He died instantly. Have you called the sheriff, Mr. Mallory?" He addressed the tall, lantern-jawed mutual manager.

Mallory shook his head. His narrow shoulders sagged, as he fidgeted, looking down the line of cashiers. The first rush of customers had left their windows. They knew something was wrong, and were craning their necks, trying to see what the

trouble was. Standing back from their windows, they gathered in twos and threes, talking in agitated voices.

"There is another door at this end," Mallory suggested. "We can have the ambulance attendants take the body out through here. It's no use letting everybody know what's happened."

The judge leaned wearily against the cashier's window ledge, supporting himself with his elbows. His inaudible voice still held authority, as he remonstrated:

"You can't move him until the sheriff says so. Please, have someone call him right away. I—I'm going outside. You'll find me on the club veranda if you need me."

He pushed away from the window, slowly opened the door, and stumbled blindly through the small, dark corridor leading to the outside of the cashier's cages.

On his way out to the veranda, he met his secretary coming down the short flight of steps. Her shining eyes were searching the now slim crowd. Seeing the judge, she hurried toward him, took his arm. The strained look on his wrinkled face prompted her to ask solicitously:

"What is it, Your Honor? Not another attack?"

He shook his gray head reassuringly, then patted her hand with his gnarled fingers.

"No, no, my dear, I'm all right. You run along and watch the race."

"I was going down to see Bill for a moment." She broke into cheery laughter. "He was going to give me a tip on the next race." She withdrew her hand from the judge's arm. "I'll be back in a minute."

Judge Wright restrained her.

"You'd better not go down there, Margaret," he told her, his voice breaking. "There's been an accident."

Fear brightened her eyes still more, making them appear twice their natural size.

"Not—not to Bill?" she begged in a low, tense voice. "He's all right, isn't he, Your Honor?"

The judge shook his head again. Then, taking her by the slim, brown arm, led her to their seat. He poured her a glass of iced water from the silvered jug, and gently broke the news to her.

Her face stiffened from the shock, then was drawn with lines of terror and grief. She dug her fingernails into her arms, to keep them from shaking convulsively.

"You'll find out who did it, won't you, Judge?" she begged, pitifully trying to keep from breaking down.

He patted her shaking shoulders.

"The sheriff will take care of that, my dear."

Her lips moved wordlessly, in another appeal. Then the tall figure of Mallory approached them. He was frowning, and biting his sun-chapped lips. He stopped at their table.

"I called Sheriff Lang," he said gruffly. "He wants you to take charge until he gets here." Knowing that Judge Wright frequently helped the police in murder investigations, he went on without waiting for his consent, "Can I have the body moved? The whole plant will be in an uproar as soon as they find out what happened."

The judge stood up, passed his hand across his tired eyes.

"They're all grown men," he said tonelessly. "Tell them what has happened, and they'll quiet down. No, the body will have to remain where it is." He looked at the drearily sobbing girl, decided that this would be the last case he would meddle in, then asked her: "I wish you would come with me, Margaret. Feel equal to it?"

SHE stood up, wiped her eyes, automatically took out her compact and dabbed at her cheeks, unaware that the make-up went on in grotesque patches. Still trembling, she followed him.

Back in the mutual department, the judge told Mallory:

"Have the money room take a balance."

"Why?" Mallory spluttered. "Do you think robbery was the motive?"

"He wasn't killed for love," the judge reproved him. "Who is the supervisor of this division?"

"Tom Carlton. He's on Fifty-two the 'out' window, until after the third race. Do you want him?"

"Yes, but I can't wait that long. Can you relieve him for a few minutes?"

Judge Wright watched Mallory walk away, then said to Margaret:

"My dear, you know more about the workings of race tracks than I do. What is an 'out' window?"

"It's the window where you can cash tickets from yesterday's races," Margaret told him. "It stays open only during the first three races."

"Thank you."

The judge's perplexed frown changed to a quick smile. He picked up Fenway's balance sheet, glanced at it, then at the money-box and ticket rack. They appeared undisturbed. The ticket rack was empty. The cashier must have been killed before the result of the first race became official.

A slim, dark, youngish man with only one arm came up and introduced himself as Tom Carlton. He was chewing on an unlighted cigar, and spoke without removing it from his mouth. He swore, then apologized.

"Sorry, Miss. I didn't expect to find no ladies here. Judge, what's going on?"

The judge ignored the question.

"How quickly can you tell me if it's all there?" he asked, pointing to Fenway's money box.

Carlton glanced at the cashier's sheet, noted the amount of his initial cash draw, then quickly counted the contents of the box. He swore some more, made a hurried recount, then swore again. The cigar dropped from his mouth.

"Two grand missing," he informed the judge. "All his fifties and a pack of twenties." He picked up the ticket rack, looked behind it. "No, he ain't cashed nothing."

"Do you have any way of recognizing those bills if they show up?"

"It ain't likely. We got the serial numbers of the fifties, but the twenties ain't marked. Too many of them used." Carlton stooped and retrieved his cigar with a swift juggling movement.

"Thanks." The judge frowned, pursuing his lips. "You can still do sleight-of-hand tricks, I see." Then he turned his back on the dead cashier, asking: "Which race do you cash the most outstanding tickets on?"

"The eighth. Lots of guys buy a ticket on the last gallop and go home without waiting to see it. They can get their money any day."

"What do you do when you close your window after the third race?"

"Check up on the sellers. Help out in the money room, count tickets, make myself generally useful. Why?"

"Where is the ticket room?"

"Main line—grandstand. Up stairs. Wanna go there?"

"Yes, but first tell me who could come into this division besides the cashiers and money room men?"

Carlton considered this for a moment, running his hand over his smooth shaven, sharp chin.

"The guard ain't supposed to let nobody in but me, Mallory, or one of the State inspectors. But they ain't so particular. Any of the sellers or cashiers from the next section comes and go as they please."

"Did Fenway play the horses?"

"Hardly ever. Two bucks now and then. Nothing to hurt. He wasn't a sucker for tips like most of them."

Margaret who had been forcing herself to attend to her secretarial duty, had been taking down the conversation with shaking fingers, closed her book with a snap.

"Please, Your Honor, let's get out of here!" she said in a high voice, verging on a hysterical scream. "I—I'm—"

She groped for her pocketbook and knocked it to the floor, spilling its contents.

Carlton bent down and picked up the bag, slowly handing her the spilled articles, one by one.

The judge took her by the hand, then told Carlton:

"Go back and relieve Mr. Mallory. Tell him we'd like to go over to the mutual office with him."

CARLTON left them. In a short while Mallory appeared and led them through a dark, underground passage which wound its way past the kitchens, and came out near the main lunch counter in the grandstand, across from the mutual office.

After holding the door open for them, Mallory pointed to the only two comfortable chairs in the office.

"The money room is in balance," he told the judge sharply. "What did you find out?"

"Who is in charge of your ticket room?" Judge Wright asked quietly. "I would like to talk to him."

Mallory picked up the telephone, rang a buzzer twice, then spoke into the instrument.

"Browning? Come to the office right away, please."

Almost immediately, a tall, elderly, round-shouldered man came in. He was in shirt sleeves, but wore a battered felt hat. He nodded at Mallory, and looked questioningly at the judge and his secretary.

"You wanted me, Mr. Mallory?" His voice was strangely thin and piping for a large man.

"This is Judge Wright and his secretary. The judge is in charge until the sheriff gets here. Tell him whatever he wants to know." Mallory got up. "I have to see that everything is going smoothly. If you need me, Judge, you can have Browning call me on the P. A."

The judge hesitated. He had a far-away look in his eyes, staring at Browning, apparently without seeing him. When the door slammed, he suddenly came back to life.

"Call Mr. Mallory back, please," he told Margaret. "I didn't mean to let him leave just yet."

When Margaret came back, followed by Mallory, the judge seemed to ignore their presence.

"What is this about tickets being cashed twice?" he asked Browning.

Browning stared, his beetle brows raised in surprise.

"What do you know about it?" he countered.

"Please, I'll ask the questions." Judge Wright sighed, exasperated. "What has been going on?"

Browning coughed, then leaned forward confidentially.

"I don't want it spread around, you understand," he said, "but there's been something screwy going on ever since the meet got under way. We balanced up to the penny one day, then later, an overpay shows up. Checking back over the cashier's bundles, I invariably find a pigeon in one of them. It's happened far too often to be accidental. Someone, and I wish I knew who it is, is taking out tickets after they are counted, waiting a few days, then cashing them for the second time. Whoever it is, he is smart enough to substitute a pigeon for the good ticket he extracts from the bundle, leaving the total count the same."

"Pigeon? I wish you'd explain. I'm afraid I'm not familiar with race-track jargon."

"A pigeon is a bad ticket. Suppose you buy a ticket on Number Five in the first race. It loses. You keep the ticket. Say Number Five wins the seventh race. Taking advantage of the crowd at the cashier's window, you present it and he pays you, then he'll be out for the amount you collected."

Mallory stood up impatiently.

"I don't see what this has to do with the murder investigation. We can find out for ourselves who is stealing the tickets."

"If you do, you'll find the murderer," Judge Wright told him quietly. "Fenway was killed because he found out who is responsible for it."

Mallory grunted, unimpressed.

"Why did you call me back?" he asked harshly. "I have work to do."

Judge Wright looked perplexed. He frowned, his stubby fingers fumbling with some papers on the top of the desk at which he was sitting.

"I really don't know," he finally admitted, "but you can go now if you wish."

Mallory strode out of the office.

"But doesn't the cashier have some way of knowing which race the ticket was sold on?" the judge asked Browning.

"Yes, there is a separate code word for each race. But occasionally, in the rush, the cashier overlooks it. It happens with the most experienced men as well as the green ones."

"I see." The judge nodded heavily. "But the switching of tickets has to be an inside job. Could they be cashed without the connivance of one of the cashiers? I mean the second time."

"Possibly, but hardly likely. The cashiers are supposed to stamp their window number on the back of every ticket they cash, then tear one corner off it. But of course they don't always do it."

"What do you do with the cashed tickets

at the end of each racing day? Who has access to them?"

"They are left in their proper slot in the ticket room until next morning. We frequently have to make a recheck, but the room is locked. I naturally have access to them, so has Mallory or any of the other officials. No, you're on the wrong track, Judge. Someone is taking them out while counting them, substituting a pigeon, then holding the good ticket for a few days and cashing it. I've tried to find out who is doing it, but have had no luck so far.

"Your Honor, I've been in charge of ticket rooms at various track for the past ten years, and I've never had anything like this happen before. I'd give fifty dollars of my own money to find out who is responsible." Browning's piping voice was pleading for help.

JUDGE WRIGHT spoke quietly, his fingers stroking his wrinkled chin. "It seems to me that you should be able to track the culprit easily enough. Tell me, what is a cashier supposed to do in case he is offered a mutilated or defaced ticket?"

"He isn't allowed to cash it unless it has the okay of either the information window or Mallory. If it's torn, one of them will paste it together on cardboard, and put his initials on the back."

"Hmm, I see. Does that happen often?"

"More often than you would think. Lots of people get so excited during a race that they tear their tickets."

"What if it has a trace of a stamp on it?"

"In that case, the cashier should stall the customer and send for the track detectives."

"Thank you, Mr. Browning. I think we can help you. Obviously Fenway discovered what was going on, so we can do the same. There is only one more question. Do you bet on the horses?"

Browning shook his nearly bald head vehemently.

"No, sir. I haven't made a bet in eight years."

"I'm glad to hear that." The judge smiled knowingly, his mild blue eyes searching the room. "How many new men do you have in the ticket room this year?"

"None." Browning shook his head again. "That's what makes it all the more difficult. They are a decent bunch."

The judge picked three fifty-dollar mutual tickets from the top of the desk, fingering them.

"Is this Mallory's desk?" he asked.

Browning nodded.

"Hm. . . ." The judge studied the tickets he held. "What happened to Number One in the first?"

"He ran out." Browning smiled apologetically. "I mean, he wasn't in the money."

"Mallory seems to be young to have charge of the entire mutual plant. Does he always gamble this heavily?"

"He isn't really in charge, Your Honor. His father is, but the old man is laid up right now, and his son is taking charge in his absence. I think he bets too much, but then he makes big money."

"Thank you, Mr. Browning. I mustn't keep you away from the ticket room any longer. But if Margaret and I may come with you for a few minutes I would appreciate it."

"Of course."

Browning got up. The judge started to follow him, made a step or two unsteadily, then stopped and laid his hand on the edge of the desk for support. Shaking visibly, he staggered back into the chair.

Margaret recognized the symptoms. Temporarily conquering her grief, she hurriedly poured a glass of water from the carafe on the desk, handed it to the judge, then picked up her handbag and rummaged in it. Her hand came out holding a small box. She opened it, took out a pill, handed it to the judge, then withdrew it, a startled look on her face.

"Please, call the doctor right away!" she hurriedly asked Browning.

"I don't need a doctor, my dear." The judge smiled wanly. "Just give me one of those darn pills, and I'll be all right in a jiffy."

Margaret shook his head savagely.

"I can't, Your Honor. There were only three pills left after you took that one during the first race, and now there are four in the box. Someone must have—" She did not finish.

"Nonsense, my dear. You probably miscounted them." The judge was feeling better already.

"I did not," she insisted. "The doctor can give you something, then we'll go home and I'll open a fresh box. I don't trust this one. You should have it analyzed."

Again the judge started to remonstrate, but stopped when the track physician entered the office, taking in the situation in a glance.

"What does he generally take when he gets one of those attacks?" the doctor asked Miss Sinclair.

Margaret showed him the box, and explained why she had not given her employer a pill.

After a brief examination, the doctor gave the judge a sedative from his emergency kit.

"You ought to go home," he advised. "Too much excitement for one day."

"I'm going in a little while. Just as soon as the sheriff gets here and takes a murderer off my hands." The judge stood up and walked after Browning to the ticket room.

Passing by the line of cashiers, busy again, paying off on the second race, Margaret took the judge by the arm excitedly.

"Oh, you know who it is, then?" Two hectic patches of color flamed in her pale cheeks.

"Of course, my dear. But please find Mr. Mallory for me."

THE clerks in the ticket room did not even look up from counting the bundles when Browning came in with the judge. Sitting on a heavy steel trunk, Judge Wright wearily passed his hand across his forehead.

"When did you find the last overpay?" he asked Browning, his voice all but inaudible.

"This morning."

"Did you find a—a pigeon, I believe you called it."

Browning nodded. He went to a long rack against the wall and took out a bundle of tickets, wrapped in an oblong voucher, and handed it to the judge.

Judge Wright examined the voucher. It showed which race the tickets represented, the numbers of the first three horses, and the total number of tickets cashed on each of them. He studied the pasteboards, puzzled, then pointed to the figures.

"Why wasn't the pigeon discovered when those tickets were first counted?"

"It apparently wasn't there then," Browning scowled.

The judge thought for a long moment, then said:

"If the original ticket was cashed twice, it must have been done at the 'out' window the second time? Isn't that so?"

Again Browning nodded sullenly.

"How many 'out' windows do you have?"

"Five downstairs in the grandstand, two in the mezzanine, and one in the clubhouse."

"Let me see yesterday's clubhouse 'outs.'"

Browning found them, telling the judge:

"I've checked them. The overpay was on Number Four in the eighth race three days ago. Those are the only tickets which can possibly help you."

"I see," the judge mused. "How many tickets were outstanding on that race up to yesterday?"

"Five, but six were cashed. And the payoff was sixty-nine dollars and change."

Judge Wright slipped the heavy rubber band off the large bundle of tickets. He put on his thick-lensed glasses and ruffled through them until he came to six which

bore the number "4" on them. He extracted them.

"Are those the tickets you mean?" he asked.

Mallory looked them over.

"Yes," he confirmed. "It just happened that they were all cashed at one window. Carlton says the same man handed him all six."

"Carlton?"

Judge Wright's frown deepened. He looked the six tickets over slowly and carefully, put them in his pocket, then hunted through the bundle again and found one which had been torn and patched. He showed it to Browning.

"See if there is an overpay on this race," he suggested. "I have to make a call with Margaret. Meet me in Mallory's office in ten minutes and be sure that both he and Carlton are there."

Out in the crowded grandstand, the judge hesitated, bewildered by the mob. He took Margaret's arm for support.

"I would like to go to the doctor's office for a few minutes, my dear. Do you know where he is?"

"What's the matter, Your Honor?" she asked, immediately solicitous. "Not feeling well?"

"I'm just fine. But come, we're wasting time."

Margaret led him to the doctor's office. The track physician jumped up as they entered, worried.

"No, no, I'm all right," Judge Wright answered his unspoken inquiry.

He looked around the office, then pointed to an elaborate X-Ray machine.

"Is that the gadget which shows you whether or not your patient has swallowed a golf ball?"

The doctor laughed, relieved.

"It will show up any foreign matter in the human body."

"Humm. Does it confine itself to humans or will it work on inanimate objects?"

"That depends. What do you want to look into?"

Judge Wright handed the doctor the patched ticket.

"Can you see through this and tell me if there is any mark on the back of the original ticket?"

"Not on this machine. But my ultra violet ray will show it up."

PLACING the ticket on a stand in front of a machine, the doctor manipulated some switches. The ticket became a blur, then as he adjusted some more gadgets, took shape again. Peering close, both Margaret and the judge gasped. Gradually a dark picture cleared.

"The original ticket was stamped before

being pasted on this cardboard," the doctor informed them. "The number is"—he looked closer—"it's Number Sixty-seven."

"Thank you, Doctor. You've solved a murder." Judge Wright was trembling as he stood up. "Well, my dear," he said to Margaret, "one more trip to the mutual office, and as soon as the sheriff arrives we can go home."

The sheriff was waiting for them. He was perched on the edge of the desk, his booted legs swinging, his stubby thumbs hitched into his gun-belt. He was smoking a foul-smelling pipe, his hard gray-blue eyes watching the three men already there. Seeing the judge and Margaret, he boomed:

"Howdy, Your Honor. What've you got for me?"

"A murderer and his accomplice, Sheriff."

"Who are they?" Sheriff Lang hopped off the desk, his gun flashing in his hand.

"Just a moment, Sheriff. We'll let the guilty men tell us their stories first."

He sat down heavily, rested his head in his cupped hands for a moment, then handed the mutual ticket toward Browning. "Is this the ticket you let me take from Carlton's bundle?"

Browning glanced at it, then nodded.

"Was there any peculiarity about the pigeons you have been turning up?" the judge went on. "Anything similiar about them?"

"Nothing." Browning frowned, biting his lips. "That is. . . . Wait a minute! Now that I think of it there was. They all had a stamp on the back of them, but it was always illegible. That what you mean?"

"Maybe," Judge Wright muttered, taking the ticket back and holding it in front of Carlton. His voice was sharp and threatening, as he demanded:

"Do you remember cashing this yesterday?"

Carlton nodded.

"Sure," he admitted. "A guy brought it to me in two pieces. I sent him to the information window with it. When he brought it back, patched and okayed, I gave him his money. Nothing wrong about that, is there?"

"Do you remember handling it, Mr. Mallory?" The judge again ignored Carlton.

Mallory did not even glance at the ticket.

"No, I never saw it before."

"That's all I wanted to know. All right, Sheriff, you can arrest Mr. Mallory for embezzlement and being an accessory to murder."

"But—but—" Mallory spluttered indignantly. "What—"

"This ticket was first cashed by the man at window Number Sixty-seven," the judge explained to Sheriff Lang, quietly "He did

the right thing, but it was then taken out of his bundle, torn in two and stuck to this piece of cardboard to hide the original stamp. Mallory put his okay on it, and Carlton cashed it for him. They have been working the same racket ever since the meet started. When Mr. Browning has all the torn tickets in Carlton's bundles examined, he will know just how many times they did it. What I don't understand is, why didn't the track detectives find it out long ago? Take Carlton with you, too. The charge against him will be first degree murder. He killed Fenway after the young man got wise to him."

"Baloney!" Carlton snarled. "You ain't got a thing on me. I'm in the clear since Mallory's okay is on them tickets. He made sure the Pinks wouldn't get wise. He never even turned the case over to them."

"Search him, Sheriff," the judge suggested in a low, tired voice. "See if he has two thousand dollars on him. He extracted that much from Fenway's money box when he was checking it for me."

The sheriff grabbed Carlton roughly and frisked him. From the inside pocket of the man's coat, he pulled out two bundles of bills. A hurried count proved the judge right.

"I won that money today!" Carlton protested. "Mallory is the one what did all the stealing! He forced me to cash them tickets for him. He—"

MALLORY stopped him. "I'll admit the embezzlement charge, Sheriff. The track won't prosecute me on that. We worked it just as the judge surmised. But I'm not going to let him"—he pointed at Carlton—"pin a murder rap on me. He told me that Fenway was wise to us. He threatened to kill him, but I thought he was bluffing, trying to scare Fenway into keeping quiet."

"I wonder—" Judge Wright turned to Margaret. "Let me have my pills, please, my dear."

Reluctantly Margaret handed him the box. She started as he opened it and began to pick them out, one by one. He rolled the four capsules thoughtfully on his roughened palms while the sheriff watched him, a perplexed frown on his heavily tanned face. After a long time, the judge spoke again, this time to the track physician.

"Doctor, my secretary claims that there is one more pill here than there should be. If that is the case, there is only one person who could have placed it there. I've never known her to make that kind of a mistake before. Now, if you would analyze them, we'd have all the evidence we need. That is if—"

Before he could finish, Carlton took ad-

vantage of the tenseness in the room and made a dive for the judge. He grabbed the pills and quickly put all four of them into his mouth.

Before he could swallow them, the sheriff's strong hands circled his throat. Carlton's face twitched, he tried to gulp down the pills, but Lang's fingers tightened inexorably. Forcing his prisoner's face toward the floor, the sheriff shook him savagely while tightening his grip ever more.

The four pills fell from Carlton's mouth, and when Lang's fingers finally relaxed, he dropped to the floor, almost unconscious.

Judge Wright had seen enough. His voice grew suddenly old and tired, as he suggested to Margaret:

"Come, my dear. Let's go out to the farm. Roses are so restful—even in grief."

He looked compassionately into the girl's tear-swollen eyes.



Enoch Dolliver of Homicide faces the toughest crime problem of his life when a murder looks like suicide—and an indiscreet lady leaves some compromising letters in a cab—in

DEATH ON THE METER

An Exciting Complete Novelet

By EDWARD RONNS

NEXT MONTH

**DOES THE
MOON AFFECT
YOU, TOO?**

**NO, I GET MY
EFFECT WITH
STARS—
STAR BLADES!**



4 for 10c





Grogan socked Lark with the automatic

OFF THE ARM

By JOHN L BENTON

When Detective Grogan tangled with a dangerous killer he found that his knowledge of odd facts was a helpful weapon!

ED GROGAN, the big plainclothesman from Headquarters, swung off the bus at Eaton and Eighth Streets. With the sun full in his pale blue eyes, Grogan plunged into that district of Lamond known familiarly as "The Jungle."

Frowsy tenements huddled together like decrepit old women. Taverns were gloomy holes in the wall. The pavements had a shiny slime and doorways and stoops along the street held their usual quota of workless loungers.

Grogan pounded on past bindle-stiffs, bums, small fry muscle men and petty grifters who smirked or yawned after him. He saw dames who eked out precarious livelihoods pennyweighting in the fine shops at the north end of town. Other dames, basking in the reflected bounty of their law-breaking boy friends, drifted past, leaving the reek of perfume in their wake.

Grogan's pale eyes searched the faces for a sign of Terry Beaumont.

Beaumont, a suspended member of Local 162, had been seen last night in the vicinity of the Waverly Theater, shortly before its cashier had been held up, robbed and shot. Grogan, who knew all about Beaumont's recent activities in connection with other

stick-ups, was out to find him and bring him in for questioning.

Fred Howley, the mousey little theater manager was unconscious in the General Hospital with a couple of slugs in him. Grogan's idea was to have Terry Beaumont on tap for identification when Howley came around. The medicos up at the etherdrome had assured him that Howley would come out of it okay. Three thousand bucks and near-murder were important!

At the Palace Tavern, Grogan paused long enough to ask the proprietor if he'd seen "T.B.," as Beaumont was affectionately called in the district.

"I ain't seen him in a week, Mr. Grogan."

Grogan knew the proprietor was lying, shook his head and went on. Then, abruptly, he had a piece of luck. Entering a cafeteria at the junction where Eighth Street crossed Munson Boulevard, the slim, blue-suited figure of Terry Beaumont, himself, appeared before Grogan's eyes for a brief instant.

"Well," Grogan grunted, "I'll be danged!"

He put his big feet into faster motion and swung in through the cafeteria's revolving door. It was around ten in the morning and the neighborhood grifters, in the coin, were

having breakfast. The appetizing tang of coffee blended with the fragrance of griddle cakes and sausages. Grogan spotted Beaumont helping himself to a tray and sidled up behind him.

BEAUMONT didn't see him. He got himself a baker apple, a dish of cereal, a cup of coffee and two hot corn muffins. He took these to a chair with one wide table-arm. Grogan brought a cup of coffee and dropped down in the adjoining chair.

"Hello, kid. Baked apple, eh? Going fancy all of a sudden, but that ain't real cream."

Beaumont raised his thin, high-cheek-boned face. His chalky skin was taut, peculiarly lusterless. Together with his sunken, muddy-colored eyes his appearance was that of one who might be suffering from lung trouble. He studied Grogan, a half-sneer beginning to twist his mouth.

"What do you mean—real cream?"

"Don't you know there's a war going on? You can't get it any more. That stuff's hypoped up with cornstarch and egg white."

Beaumont didn't say anything. He kept his eyes glued on the plainclothesman's rugged face, but he was nervous. Grogan saw that when Beaumont picked up a spoon and began to toy with it.

"What do you want?"

Grogan shrugged. "You—naturally. You've pulled some fast ones lately, kid. Nothing we could pin and make stick, but last night's a horse from another garage. You'd better tie into that chow and come down with me and share some conversation with Inspector Rossi. He has the sixty-four dollar question all ready to ask you."

"Yeah? What about?"

Terry Beaumont's nervousness increased. The spoon began to tap on the broad oak arm of the chair. He twisted and squirmed uneasily, trying to keep his expression blank and the sneer working full time.

Suddenly, Grogan's attitude changed. He lost the easy conversational tone he'd been using. He went tense, the pale blue eyes shifting from Beaumont's hatchet-thin face to the row of chairs on the other side of the cafeteria.

From one of them, a tall, brawny young man in a greasy felt hat and an unpressed brown suit, was rising. Grogan caught a glimpse of half a glass of milk, half a dish of prunes and a whole stack of toast. The party wearing the greasy hat headed toward the revolving door.

"Sorry, kid. Guess I've made a mistake. Go ahead. Eat your breakfast and enjoy it."

Grogan hit the street half a minute behind the unpressed brown suit. Its wearer struck off down Eighth Street at a fast pace. He dodged in and out among the pedestrians, looking back over his shoulder once or

twice. But Grogan, an expert at tailing, was confident the guy hadn't spotted him.

At Eighth and Elm, luck was good again. Grogan almost collided with Sid Harris, one of the other plainies working for Inspector Rossi.

Grogan hi-signed Harris and spoke fast, "Cafeteria at the corner of the Boulevard. Terry Beaumont, third chair from the left. Blue suit. Pick him up and take him in."

"Right."

Harris rolled away and Grogan, marking his prey, was in time to see the brown suit glide up the front steps of one of the frowsy tenements. It disappeared in the murk of the vestibule. Grogan almost knocked over a pushcart getting across the slimy street and into the building.

Quick footsteps dwindled on the uncarpeted stairs. For all of his size and weight, Grogan was fast and light on his feet. He made the first landing, two steps at a time. He was puffing when he reached the second, but satisfied. He got there just in time to see a door close to the left of the stairs.

Grogan's prominent brows came together. He made sure his department rod was in its shoulder clip before he dropped a hand to the blue china knob and turned it. The door was locked. Grogan tapped lightly on the panels. After a long pause he heard the click of heels.

The door opened and a platinum blonde gave him mascaraed attention.

"Hello, big boy. What's yours?"

She was one of the flashy frails of the district, probably Greasy Hat's lawfully wedded wife and, in an argument, as tough to handle as a gungel loaded with lead. Grogan smiled affably.

"Building Department check-up, sister. I want to give your fire-escape a gander."

THE girl looked at Grogan doubtfully. "What's the matter with the fire-escape?"

"If you've got any flower pots or groceries on it," Grogan said impressively, "you'll have to clear them off." He put his big foot against the door. "I'll only be a minute."

"Who is it, Mae?" a man's voice asked from some rear room.

"A big lug who says he works for the Building Department. He wants to look at the fire-escape."

"Tell him to stick his head in a pail of water three times and pull it out twice!" the voice instructed. "Tell him to beat it. We ain't showing our fire-escape today."

"Sorry, sister," Grogan said, and walked in.

"Charley!" the girl cried. "He's in!"

Grogan came to a stop just over the threshold. He used a foot to push the door shut and kept his diamond-hard gaze on

the entrance to the room beyond. Mae's yelp was the proper bait. Almost immediately the man in the brown suit appeared.

At close range, and with the felt hat off, Grogan identified him immediately. He was "Lark" Benson, another suspended, ex-member of Local 162.

Recognition flared in Benson's quick, stabbing gaze. He stopped short in the doorway, his sullen face turning deadpan.

"Building Department?" Benson looked at Mae. "This guy's a copper."

"Cop?" Mae's mascaraed eyes went altogether wide. "What does he want?"

"That's easy." Grogan watched Benson warily. "Him and me are strolling downtown. It's a beautiful day for walking."

"Like heck!" Benson snarled.

Grogan saw Benson's hand make a move. He acted with quick decision. He had his own gun out and one arm around Lark Benson's wife before the man could unlimber his own artillery. Benson's gun went up, leveled—pointed toward the floor.

"That's better! Drop it, Lark!"

Benson's automatic clattered to the floor. Grogan released the girl and reached for it. That was a mistake. Mae Benson grabbed for the nearest hard object and let Grogan have it on the back of the head.

The hard object proved to be a plaster-and-bronze bookend.

Grogan saw a rainbow of shimmering light. The room spun around but somehow he didn't stop to reach for his gun. Agonized fingers clamped over it. Lark kicked him in the face, but he hung on tenaciously.

Mae picked up a chair and lunged to give Grogan a further workout. He rolled to one side, spitting blood. Dimly, as if from a distance, he heard Benson's voice.

"C'mon, honey! We lam!"

The rainbow vanished in a haze and things grew more normal. The two were in the bedroom. Grabbing for a valise or something, Grogan thought groggily. He made a Herculean effort to straighten out and get a grip on himself. The next minute Lark and the girl came out of the bedroom.

Grogan bulleted up from the floor. He socked Lark with the automatic and jammed Mae Benson against the wallpaper. Lark staggered back and the girl began to scream. She tried to bite when Grogan's big hand went over her mouth. Her toeless shoes kicked viciously, but he held her there, rigid and spring-tight, until the last of the fog disappeared.

After that it took no time at all to adjust the handcuffs.

Down at Headquarters, while Grogan let the medical examiner wash his mouth out and put some stinging caustic on his cut lips, Inspector Rossi gave Benson a going over. Rossi had about finished when Grogan went upstairs.

"You're in, Ed." The inspector nodded approvingly. "It took a half hour to break Terry Beaumont down—twenty minutes were enough for Benson. We've got a full, double-spaced confession. Terry fronted for Lark last night, but Benson was the party who lifted the three G's and gunned Fred Howley. It's all on the record."

Grogan rolled his tongue over his sore mouth. The caustic puckered it. He was glad Benson hadn't worn spiked shoes.

"I hope they give him life," he mumbled.

ROSSI frowned. "Swell police work, but I don't get it. Benson was clean as far as we were concerned. How'd you ever get the notion to go after him?"

"On account of I was once a member of Local One Sixty-two before I joined the police force."

"Local One Sixty-two? What's that?" Grogan grinned. "Telegrapher's union. Dots and dashes. Once you learn 'em, it's like swimming—you don't forget. And when you hear a spoon tapping Morse on the arm of a cafeteria chair, and a guy gets up and leaves without finishing his breakfast, you naturally get suspicious."

"Tapped out like this," Grogan explained, using his fingers on the top of the inspector's desk. "D-I-C-K-S-C-R-A-M. Split 'em in two and you'll get what I mean!"

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, knee pains, loss of pep and energy, setting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.



I swept aside the curtain
and put in an Act Three
climax appearance

PUBLICITY FOR THE CORPSE

By C. S. MONTANYE

Johnny Castle, sports writer, seeks an interview with a South American lightweight wonder—and finds a murder mystery that all but knocks him out for the count before the final solution bell rings!

CHAPTER I KID FROM RIO

THE Brazilian flag was full of flutters, the waiting room jammed, when we reached the La Guardia Airport that morning.

Cameramen, newshawks, the socially prominent, the socially deficient, and a flock

of the morbidly curious, who had read some of "Tip" McCabe's advance hypo, were on hand to get a flash of Alfredo Sanchez and party. The folks from Rio were flying in from California and due at any minute.

Somebody in authority took a peek at my press card and nodded. So I started shoving Ellie Horton through the jam, angling for the front row and the big doors leading

A COMPLETE CRIME MYSTERY NOVELET

to the ramp and the cement walk outside. Ellie, a sob sister on the *Orbit*—the same sheet that paid me off for the sports page stuff I dreamed up—didn't seem to mind being pushed around. In fact, Ellie was slightly excited.

"Looks like we've made it in time, Johnny."

"See if you can locate McCabe," I suggested.

from the Garden rafters. It seemed that Rico cuddled comfortably under the wing of Alfredo Sanchez, millionaire coffee planter and amateur sportsman. Sanchez finally had succumbed to McCabe's wires and letters and was bringing the little leather-pusher to Manhattan—via Hollywood.

However, Rico was not the main draw at the airport.

A babe tagged Bonita Lores happened to



Lorch picked up the vase with both hands and took aim

But there wasn't a sign of the big shot Garden matchmaker and pugilistic power anywhere.

Tip McCabe had spread the word around that "Young Juan" Rico, a lightweight sensation in the Good Neighbor country to the South, was the hardest-hitting, fastest piece of boxing machinery that he had ever rolled a bloodshot optic at.

For months Tip had been trying to get the kid from Rio to come North so he could match him with the present champ of the lightweight division and have 'em hanging

be the flypaper. She, the Betty Grable of the banana districts, had already been photographically publicized through the country.

In her daguerreotypes, dark-eyed, glamorous and somewhat scantily attired, the tropic tomato had been a photogenic sensation.

But there was a drawback. Bonita had been spoken for and from all present accounts happened to be the none-other fiancée of the rich mocha-and-java king Mr. Sanchez himself!

I KNEW the stop-over in California had been a brief pause in which the gal had been screen-tested for New Era Pictures. Tested and not found wanting. She had signed for a couple of films a year and, it appeared, all the Hollywoodenheads had gone in the tank for her with the greatest of ease and pleasure.

Ellie, leaning against me, had come down to write a piece about Senorita Pulchritude. My assignment was to get a slant at Rico and give my public a general impression of

lums who wouldn't stop at anything short of murder and, in fact, wouldn't pause there if there was plenty of dough on the line.

Finding them in the airport crowd was the same as discovering a pair of roaches in a bowl of consomme!

Just to make sure I passed out a second glance. No mistake. I couldn't miss Lorch's strange, parchment-wrinkled pan, his deep-set, lazy eyes or prominent, bony jaw. Or the well-groomed Lou Candell whose round, flat face was a study in vapid stupidity. It



a first-hand gander.

A loudspeaker began to blare and at the same moment I spotted a couple of familiar-looking guys in the mob. One was Dewey Lorch, the other, a Lou Candell. Added together they didn't spell mother!

These two boys, I happened to know, were notorious grifters, clippers and common felons who had been mixed in various rackets and were more than well-acquainted with the interior of some of our biggest and best jail-houses. A couple of tough hood-

was a coin's spin as to which of the two was the worse. And no matter whether it came up heads or tails you were bound to lose!

"Johnny!" Ellie poked me in the ribs. "The plane—it's coming in!"

Outside, the queen of the air circled gracefully over the field. In the summer sun it looked like a huge gray gull. It swooped lower, circled again, then set its landing gear gently down and taxied in toward the ramp.

The crowd began to mill. The next in-

stant a little fellow with a dime's worth of cigar in his puss elbowed up and gave me a nudge. It was McCabe, in the flesh.

"Hello, Castle," Tip said. "What are you waiting for? Follow me, pal!" Doing a Notre Dame plunge for goal, he yelped, "One side! Leave us through!"

Outside, passengers were already alighting from the big ship. McCabe, bright-eyed and Irish, stood poised and waiting. I could hear Ellie breathing faster, her breath coming in little gulps. More passengers, and then the people responsible for the Brazilian flag and the excitement.

Alfredo Sanchez got out first. The coffee magnate was as wide as he was tall. A light tan edition of Mr. Five-by-Five. His chins were so popular they had gone into a second edition. He wore a wrinkled white suit, a Panama dicer, and a diamond ring on one pudgy finger sparkled like a quart of grape when he stretched out the fin to shake hands with McCabe.

"Well, how do you like this?" Tip gurgled a minute later. "The bloke don't speak no English!"

Next to alight was a smug-faced man, with a typical May-I-have-your-hat-sir air to him. He was Harry Babbitt, Sanchez' valet. I didn't like his looks. Too sleek and obsequious, for entire comfort.

Following the valet, the lightweight sensation of the monkey country slid into view.

I STABBED a glance at Juan Rico and wondered what door he had run into. The kid from Rio sported a black eye, a cut mouth and a large blue bruise on his right cheek. He was slim, wiry, midnight dark as to hair and eyes, and dead-panned. He stood slightly behind Senor Sanchez while all eyes focused on the plane's door.

All Bonita Lores needed was a fanfare as she climbed languorously down to the ground.

One look was enough to notify anyone that photos and descriptive matter hadn't been exaggerated. Sanchez's fiancée was distinctly a dish.

She featured the unusual combination of raven-black hair and gray eyes. Funny eyes for a South American gal. Her skin was as flawless as her figure, and that was more exciting than anything that had ever walked down a Winter Garden runway.

"Only one drool to a customer," Ellie whispered maliciously. "Push your eyes back in place, Johnny, and let me pass."

She clucked for Jake, the lens-and-shutter expert we had brought along with us. I edged over to Tip McCabe to get a line on what he was talking to Sanchez about.

Babbitt, the super-smooth valet, was doing a good job as interpreter, but there

were too many people around. Tip felt crowded and said so.

"Look, Castle," he said to me. "This here is no place for interviews. These folks are staying at the Wilshire. Grab a cab and follow us up. I'll tell the rest of the newspaper boys."

Thirty minutes later I was in Sanchez's suite. It was on the fourth floor of the glittering Hotel Wilshire on Central Park South. I found out that the caffeine producer, Harry Babbitt, and Rico occupied the rooms. Bonita Lores had an apartment of her own farther down the hall.

Sanchez, via Tip, was doing it in style. One entire side of the living room consisted of bottled goods and glasses. There was more Scotch there than I'd seen around for months. The newspaper bunch started in and went to work on it. I got Young Rico aside and put on my quiz show.

He spoke pretty fair English. I asked him about the black eye and the taped mouth.

"I fall downstairs—in the dark," he said, and smiled.

I pumped him for an article and wandered back to Ellie. She had finished her routine with the charming Bonita and was standing in line.

"Coming back to the office, Johnny?" she said.

I looked thoughtfully across at the Lores number. She was planted near a bay window, with Sanchez beside her. The sun gave her hair a polished sheen. Her softly-curved lips looked like a couple of scarlet flowers.

"I'll stick around for a while," I said.

"But she's engaged," Ellie cautioned. "And you know the Latin temperament. When they make a cutting remark the knife goes with it!"

A little while later McCabe threw a speech. It was a build-up for Rico. Tip reeled off the kid's record south of the Equator. It was impressive, even if it didn't mean much in Manhattan. While it was going on Rico ducked behind a set of curtains closing the living room off from an alcove.

"Gents," McCabe wound up, "I've arranged for you to get a look at Young Rico in fighting form. Camera guys, come up closer. All right, draw them curtains."

The portieres whisked back. Rico, in purple trunks and ring shoes, stood in front of a portable punching bag. He got Tip's nod and went to work on the bouncing leather.

Rico did look good. Lean and hard, he was not too muscled up. He was fast—with his hands and feet. The bag workout was routine, but it was the way he did it that impressed. Cameras snapped all over the place. Flash bulbs exploded.

There didn't seem much of a chance to cut in on the glamorous Bonita. She was still staked out beside the fat boy with the wrinkled white suit and the duplicate chins. So I hoisted one more and decided to trek back to the office and write my piece.

I shook hands with Sanchez. His mitt in mine felt like a damp sponge in a warm bathtub. He didn't know what I said, but he smiled. I smiled and turned to the senorita.

But the beautiful Bonita wasn't there.

She didn't seem to be anywhere in the room. I wove a way to the door, went through the foyer and out to the corridor. When I reached it, I was in time to see Miss Lores heading for her own suite. But before she made it there was an interruption.

One of the elevators had come up and stopped.

Out of it emerged the two guys from the waiting room at the airport—Lorch and Candell. Both glommed the pretty senorita and put on the stop.

"Just a minute!" Dewey Lorch ordered her. "Not so fast. We want to talk to you!"

CHAPTER II

SUCKER



BONITA LORES froze. I could hear her smothered exclamation.

She looked from one to the other. When she spoke her voice was unsteady and the delightful slur she gave the American language was conspicuous by its absence.

"What is it?" she asked sibilantly.

Candell spotted me the next second and pitched a signal to his partner. Both pulled books out of their pockets.

"What goes on?" I asked.

With a sharp little breath Bonita wheeled around to me.

"These men, senor! I do not know them and—"

"All we want is her autograph," Lorch said belligerently. "Any poison in that?"

"Yeah, just her autograph," Lou Candell chimed in.

I looked from Lorch's strange, crinkled face to Candell's moon-shaped pan. Then I caught the appeal in the gray eyes of the girl and decided to make their business my business.

"Go on—scram!" I ordered. "Beat it before I call the house dick!"

"You keep your big nose out of this!" Lorch said. "I know you, Castle!"

"By the same token, I'm acquainted with you." I pressed the bell for an elevator. "Air!" I said to Lorch and Candell briefly, when the lift arrived. "Make it rapid!"

They didn't argue. They put their little books away and filed into the cage. The corridor was a better place when they had gone.

"Thank you, senor." The slur was back again, flavoring each word, but I saw she was still a trifle shaken, frightened. "You were nice to make them go away."

"It's okay, honey. Think nothing of it. You don't know 'em or," I added, "do you?"

She shook her ebon head. "I never saw them before in my whole life!"

It sounded truthful. I wondered what Lorch and Candell had in mind. One thing was sure. They hadn't gone to the airport as part of any welcoming committee. Likewise, they hadn't come up to the Wilshire for an autograph.

They were definitely on the earn.

But how? In what way? Bonita said she didn't know them. They knew her. They had wanted to lean on her ear. What for?

I let it go and saw Bonita as far as her door. "Just in case they decide to stop around again," I said, feeling for a card and a pencil, "you'd better have a copy of my phone number."

I scratched off both phones, office and apartment. She put the card in her bag. The gray eyes came up level with mine. A pair of swell orbs, deep and dreamy, with more appeal and urge than the business end of a tommy-gun.

"Thank you again, senor."

Back at my desk, it took three typewritten pages on Young Juan Rico and a half a dozen nips from a bottom drawer flask before I could untangle myself from the eyes and lips of the South American bonfire. . .

Tip McCabe didn't waste any time. He matched Rico for a slap at the prevailing lightweight champ. That was a smart little guy named Artie Borden. Artie had won himself the crown the hard way. A veteran, who knew the book, I figured the fifteen-round bout was a natural for a capacity house.

A couple of days passed.

Then Beth Wheaton, one of the switchboard operators, saw me when I was heading for my desk and waved a red flag. Beth shoved a memo in my face. It was from Bonita Lores. It said I was to call her up at the Wilshire.

"Lores?" Beth sniffed. "The dame who's been getting all the free photography?"

"Pick up the chips," I said. "You win."

She sniffed again. "Flying kind of high, ain't you? I mean, I read how this doll's movie-contracted and matrimonially inclined. Where do you fit in?"

"Ask Phil Baker," I said. "Maybe you'll get sixty-four bucks back."

"It don't sound regular to me, brother," Beth remarked.

"Jingle the Wilshire for me. I'll take it on the desk phone. And don't bother to listen in. This will be strictly in Spanish."

A couple of minutes later Bonita's tantalizing tone drifted over the wire.

"Mr. Castle? I wonder if you will do me a favor."

"Name it!"

"Would you take me to dinner tonight?"

SHE had to repeat it before I was sure it wasn't a gag. I told her I'd be only too happy. She said seven-thirty in the lobby of the hotel, and rang off.

"Lucky stiff!" Beth's voice intruded.

I hung up. Somehow Beth's last word echoed unpleasantly in memory. "Stiff!" It didn't sound good. Besides, stiffs were never lucky.

Bonita was waiting in one of the cozy, dimly-lighted little rooms off the Wilshire's lobby. It was exactly seven-thirty. She wore a cool, summery something that didn't hide any of the curves or contours. It made a perfect foil for the inky-black hair and the kindergarten complexion.

Instead of nylon she wore liquid stockings. But how she ever got her shapely stems in the bottle I couldn't figure. The same deep, dreamy look was in her gray eyes when she slipped her slender, lacquer-tipped fingers into mine.

"Where's Alf?" was my first, and most natural query.

"Senor Sanchez?" She laughed softly. "He and Juan are at a dinner. Senor McCabe is giving it."

I remembered. Tip was throwing a meal at the Uptown A. C. for the trade. I'd had an invitation, but had passed it principally because it was too hot to sit in a boiled shirt and listen to a lot of windy, ungrammatical speeches.

I was glad now I hadn't gone.

"Ready?" I asked Bonnie.

I took her up to the Ardmore Roof. Class and quality, quiet and refinement. None of the Broadway tribe to cut in. The setting was a sort of open-air garden, the sky was the roof, and the stars were out in quantity.

Bonita took a look around and nodded approval.

"I like it here, senor."

"Look, pet," I said. "Drop the 'senor.' I'm Johnny to you and you're Bonnie to me from now on. Right?"

"Of course."

She took a sherry to match my Martini. I didn't hurry her. Whatever she had on her mind had to break without pressure. I asked a few questions about Rio. She told me about her home town and nothing much happened until the jellied soup came in.

"Those two men," she said then, and her voice went down a pitch. "The ones who

were in the hall the other day. Remember?"

"Sure. What about them?"

"The thin one—the one with the funny face—he has telephoned me twice. He says he wants to see me."

She meant Lorch.

"Did he say about what?" I asked.

"No. But he said it was important. That I would be in lots of trouble if I didn't talk to him."

"What kind of trouble?"

That was no good. She didn't know. Apparently, Dewey had buzzed her and laid on the threat. Bonita explained that Lorch knew about the Uptown Club's dinner, and that Bonita would have the evening to herself.

"He said," she went on, "I was to come to an address tonight at half-past ten. That if I didn't come I would be sorry tomorrow."

I thought that one over.

"You've got the address?" I asked.

She nodded and I thought some more.

"Okay," I said. "If he wants to see you, maybe you'd better go. Find out what the angle is. I'll go along, too—just to keep it regular and in order."

Bonita flashed me a look of gratitude. Her eyes widened.

"That is what I was going to ask if you would do for me, senor—Johnny! You must be a mind-reader."

At my suggestion she passed me the instructions she had received over the phone. Ten-thirty at a number in the Seventies, West Side. I put the paper in my pocket and got the conversation around to another topic.

I was just as curious as she was. Lorch and Candell must have an in somewhere. But what was it? What did they want, and on what basis did they throw out the threats?

Halfpast ten on the nose our taxi docked before an ordinary six-story apartment house on a semi-respectable side-street. Once the neighborhood had been fairly aristocratic. Lately, the old-fashioned brownstone houses had gone the way of that type of real estate and become boarding establishments.

I knew that a lot of chiselers and strong-arm gentry were making that part of town their headquarters. For a minute I wished I had a gun in my pocket.

BUT it was too late to go back to my place for the artillery. So I guided Bonnie through a vestibule and into the main hall of the building. There was a list of the tenants on a chart wired to the self-service elevator's grille. I checked and found "D. Lorch" was "Apt. 5B."

The elevator, as if it had eyes, stopped at Floor Number Five. I rolled the door open

and hunted for 5B. It wasn't hard to find. Around a bend in the corridor on the south side of the place. A pencil of light lay along the crack of the door. I pushed the bell and breathed in the fragrance of Bonita's uncovered head.

"Yeah?"

The door jerked open. Lorch, in his shirt-sleeves, looked out. A cigarette dangled from one corner of his mouth. The wrinkled face went as black as Bonnie's tresses when he saw me.

"What do you want, Castle?" he demanded.

"Nothing. I brought Miss Lores up as per directions. Being a stranger in town you couldn't expect her to come alone."

His lazy eyes flickered from me to the girl. I thought he was about to slam the door in our faces. Instead, with a change of expression, he pulled it wider.

"Come in."

between my shoulders as a special persuader. "Up—high!"

Bonita gasped. I followed instructions quickly. Candell's left hand patted over me in a deft frisk.

"No cannon, Dewey," he said.

"Take him in the other room." Lorch spoke out the corner of his mouth. "Shut the door and keep him there until I finish with the dame!"

"Come on, sucker. Step!" The rod pressed in a bit harder.

"Sucker" was right. I'd asked for it, walked into it with open eyes. That didn't make me feel any better. Being ordered around like some dorb without the ordinary quantity of gray matter! Being shown up in front of Bonita Lores' agitated gaze as a moron!

They were toughies. I knew their record. I knew how far they would go, but I didn't think about that then. A white-hot flare of

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The room we were ushered into was a typically furnished apartment. Grand Rapids with a vengeance. Dime store *objets d'art*. Dusty curtains at the windows where the shades were drawn. Musty, cigarette-stained air.

And Dewey Lorch, leering at us!

Bonita seemed to step closer to me instinctively. I watched Lorch as he sidled around to shut the door. There was a dark mouth of a hall beside me. I looked at that, too.

"I came here," Bonita said, and her voice trembled a little. "I want to know what you wish. Why have you telephoned me? Why have you threatened me?"

Lorch kept eyeing me without replying. Finally, he seemed to listen to what the girl said to him.

"Just a minute," he said then. "One thing at a time, babe. I didn't expect you would be bringing company with you. I don't like company—this kind. I don't want him listening in and—"

"Get 'em up!" Candell ordered, from the rear. He added the jam of steel to a point

anger blazed up like tinder catching a spark. Instead of going forward I used a heel in a quick, savage backward lunge.

I felt a crack as it collided with bone. Candell let out a yelp of pain. The gun shifted, dropped away from my shoulders. Before he could get it in firing position again I spun around with the speed of a crazy top and used both hands.

One grabbed Candell's throat. The other prisoned his pistol wrist.

My right hand felt out a length of windpipe. I closed it off. My left hand twisted Candell's arm over and back. Lesson One in Jap bone-breaking methods. He screamed like a hurt pup. The .38 he had been hanging onto slammed to the floor.

That was what I wanted.

I put a knee in the pit of Lou's stomach and threw him off. Then I went after the gun. Everything so far had worked for me. The only trouble was I had temporarily forgotten Lorch.

I heard Bonita's warning cry. It came a split second before I scooped up Candell's derringier.

Lorch had picked up an imitation hand-painted vase. Before I could get the gun pointed I saw him lift the vase with both hands and take aim.

Bonita tried to grab Lorch, from the rear, but wasn't quick enough. She didn't even spoil his shot.

Lorch heaved. I saw the vase coming, tried to duck, but didn't quite make it.

The big missile caught me between the left temple and shoulder. If he had thrown a truck at me it couldn't have been more effective.

I quit cold, as a lot of deep, rushing blackness closed in on me!

CHAPTER III

CRIMSON SPLASHED



HAND kept shaking me. Not a friendly, gentle hand, either, but a rough, compelling grip on my shoulder that had no consideration for the lovely dream I had been dreaming. Simultaneously, a voice began to penetrate the fog.

"Come on now, wake up!" it said. "You're all right! Just a thump on the head. Come on, open them eyes!"

I did and looked hazily into the weather-beaten countenance of one of Commissioner Valentine's employees.

The big cop grinned. "That's better. Here, take a drink of this."

It was ordinary water in an ordinary glass. Not too cold, but wet enough. I sloshed some around in my mouth, emptied it in a convenient flower pot and sat up straighter.

Pieces of the vase Lorch had mowed me down with were all over the floor. The impact had laid me across the threshold of the dark hall, face down on a couple of yards of mangy carpet. There was a buzzing in my ear, a sort of pseudo-paralysis on the left side of my neck.

I got up groggily, bobbed into the living room and flopped down on a sofa. Except for the bluecoat and me the apartment was apparently empty. I glanced up at him. What was he doing there? How had he got in?

"I'm Hagen," he explained, reading my mind. "We were up Riverside Drive when I got this call in the prowler car. We came right down. What's it all about?"

Call? I gazed at him stupidly, my mind beginning to click again. If anyone had phoned Headquarters it must have been Bonita. I thought that over massaging my stiff neck.

Bonnie! Oddly, I felt a little relieved. If she had been able to put a message through to the police it meant she must be all right.

"It's nothing, Hagen." I tried to make it sound pleasant. "Just a friendly argument—with a dame. She played rough and . . . No complaint."

He cocked an eye at me. "Who are you?" "Castle, the *Orbit*." I showed him my identification card. "Nice of you to drop around. I guess Helen got worried and thought maybe she'd hurt me." I flexed my arms and tried to smile. "I'm okay. All in one piece."

"Helen who?"

"The gal friend—Lorch, Helen Lorch," I told him as glibly as possible. "Have a drink on me, Officer." I fished five bucks from my leather and passed it over. "Have two drinks."

Hagen rubbed his chin. Being a good policeman he wanted to get his teeth in something—all four of them. But the finif and the casual way I tried to make the situation appear, was plenty of herring. Red, good.

Hagen shook his head and sighed.

"Okay, if that's the way you want it, mister. Leaving or staying?"

"Sticking around. Maybe she'll come back and apologize. Good-night, Officer. Thanks. Next time I see the commissioner I'll speak a word for you."

"Hmmm!" Hagen grunted, stopping to make a notation in his official book and then flat-footing out.

I went in the bathroom and ran cold water in the basin. I sopped a towel in it, wrung it out and made a cold compress. That helped. In the kitchen I found a can of beer in the refrigerator. That didn't do any harm, either. Then I got a cigarette going and went back to the couch.

The problem was fairly easy. When Lorch had knocked me out he had got scared. Scared enough to gather Candell and Bonita and duck in a hurry. The call to Headquarters indicated that Bonita had left them, or that they had let her go. I felt better every minute.

There wasn't a telephone in the apartment. But there was a cheap, flat-top desk. I sat down in front of it and thumbed through the contents of the drawers. A couple of letters looked fairly interesting, so I stuck them in my pocket. Then, after a glance at the bedroom, I turned off the lights and left.

A telephone booth in a corner drug store was ready and waiting when I went in. I dialed the Wilshire. The operator on duty listened to what I had to say, rang the Lores suite and reported there was no answer.

"Connect me with Senor Sanchez," I said next.

Harry Babbitt answered. The valet's smug voice came over the wire.

"This is Castle," I explained. "I'm trying

to get in touch with Senorita Lores. Her rooms don't answer. Do you know anything about her?"

"No, sir, I don't."

I dropped it there and went back to my own place.

TRYPING again at nine the next morning chalked up a better result. Bonnie answered as soon as her phone tinkled.

"Johnny," I said. I hoped she got the happy note in my voice. "I've been worried. Are you all right?"

"I am all right, senor."

The way she said it, her tone, and the "senor" business, were like a clout on the chin. I could feel the freeze over the wire.

"I want to see you, honey," I said. "How about lunch?"

"I am sorry, senor. I shall be busy today."

"Wait a minute. What's wrong?" The brush-off didn't set well. Something was as phony as the system I talked over. "You stay where you are. I'll be over in a few minutes."

That did it.

"Senor! I told you I am busy. I cannot see you! You will waste your time coming here. I mean that!"

She hung up before I could add anything further. I laid the telephone back on its cradle and went out to breakfast.

So Dewey Lorch had put a muzzle on her, had he? The switch made it figure that way. Fair weather last night, snow and sleet this morning.

What did Lorch have on the gal? Something important, if he could shut her up. And he *had* shut her up. I cast around for a reason, for some hint of an answer, but couldn't guess. Finally, I decided to let it go.

After all, it wasn't any of my affair. I had wanted to help, had got conked for my trouble, and sidetracked by the babe in the bargain. . . .

Two days passed.

The Young Rico-Artie Borden fracas papers had been drawn up and signed. The fisticuffs were set for Labor Day at one of the ball parks. Already the advance ticket sale promised to break records. Rico had gone up to Jack Gavitty's camp near White Plains, to get an edge. Nothing further concerning the glamorous exile from Rio had developed and, at the *Orbit*, Beth Wheaton had laid off the puns.

A couple of times I had considered going up to Apt. 5B and kicking Dewey Lorch's teeth in. Just as an even-up. But each time I shrugged the notion aside. Why tangle with a dead issue?

Only it wasn't defunct.

It must have been around two o'clock that

Wednesday A.M. when Don Ameche's invention disturbed my heavy slumbers. The telephone in the front room of my suite kept ringing and ringing. It was one of those hot, humid nights. Airless and airtight.

I finally stumbled in and stopped the jangle.

"Hello? What the—"

"Johnny!" Bonnie's voice, terse and vibrant, was more of a wake-up than a pail of cold water. "Johnny! Can you come over to the hotel—quick!"

"What is it? What's happened?"

"Alfredo! I can't talk more! I think something's happened to him! Oh, hurry—please!"

The Wilshire was quiet and deserted when a night-hawking clock-ark dropped me at its marquee. A sleepy-eyed elevator runner took me to the proper floor. I went past the spot where the Lorch-Candell combination had put the stop on the senorita that other morning. I went on to Bonnie's front door, tapped and got immediate service.

"Come in, Johnny!"

She wore lounging pajamas with a sort of bolero coat. They were a vivid green silk. The big gray eyes were wide and frightened. The red lips trembled. So did the hand that reached out and seized my arm. I forgot all about the brush-off!

"What about Sanchez?" I asked quickly.

"I think something's happened to him! Harry telephoned me a minute before I called you. Harry—Babbitt. He says he heard a noise in Alfredo's rooms. He says it sounded like someone was fighting. Then he heard a thud. He—Harry says he was afraid to go in. He wanted to know what to do!"

"Come on!" I said.

I LED the way straight to the Sanchez suite. The door was unlocked, a light on in the foyer. I almost fell over Babbitt when I went in. The super-smooth valet wore a dressing gown, pajamas and a complexion a shade whiter than skimmed milk.

"He's in there!" Babbitt said in a husky voice, when we were in the living room. He pointed a shaky finger in the general direction of a small hall that led away from the alcove where Rico had gone through his bag-punching routine for the press. "In there!"

"Stay here while I look," I directed Bonita.

The little hall ended at the door of the senor's bedroom. It was halfopen. No light came out except the shine of the stars at the three raised windows. I fumbled around until I located the wall switch. I clicked that on and immediately was affected with abrupt and sudden *mal de mer*.

Gazing at the victims of foul play was no novelty to me. Neither was murder. I had run into it several times in the past. But to find the fat, rich Senor Sanchez with the entire back of his head caved in, and the bed on which he lay a welter of crimson, was somewhat nauseating.

I left the light and backed out in a hurry, shutting the door after me.

In the living room, Babbitt licked his lips like a thirsty dog that had just been watered. Bonnie, stiff and tense, watched me come in, the gray eyes full of questions.

"Johnny! Is he—"

I nodded and went on to the telephone. No use wasting time answering questions. I knew the Wilshire outfit wouldn't like it—calling the cops before they were notified—but that wasn't any brake.

"Police Headquarters—hurry it up," I said to the drowsy plug-slinger downstairs. Then, a minute or two later, "Headquarters? Connect me with Homicide!"

CHAPTER IV

MULLIN CALLS



MY OLD arch-friend, Captain Fred Mullin, Homicide's head man, together with Detectives Larry Hartley and Ed Wheeler, put in an appearance while I was still trying to calm the excited Bonita.

Mullin, who had gained prominence by a strong-arm, slug-'em-first and question-them-later system, didn't seem happy because of my call. Mullin had no sense of humor, nothing except a head resting between a pair of ears, two colorless eyes, a set of hand-sewn features and a stocky figure that would have made a swell model for an October ale keg.

Followed by his two straight men, Mullin, after locking the door of the suite, hot-footed it to the Sanchez bedroom.

He came back, his jaws set. His dislike for me stuck out like a flag at an auction. The feeling was mutual. Once, I had got in a jam with the captain because I'd printed a piece about him in the *Orbit* which wasn't entirely flattering. It was when Mullin had been cracking down on back-alley dice games and letting the big gamboliers continue to ride, unquestioned, in their coach-and-fours.

I had given it a humorous slant and the laugh had been on Freddie for ten days thereafter. Mullin had never forgiven me.

"Who found the body?" he barked.

"I did." I smiled, adding, "Another one, Captain. Amazing the business I dig up for you."

Hartley came back and used the telephone. Meanwhile, the hotel clerk had got

wind of the Law's arrival and the house detective and manager were at the locked door, working out their knuckles.

Hartley took care of them while Mullin went to work on Bonita Lores and Babbitt. The medical examiner yawned a way in sometime later and, after I had been given permission to contact the *Orbit's* city desk, Mullin said I could go home.

"But no further, Castle!" he warned. "I don't like the way you're continually turning up murders. Sooner or later I'm going to tie one on you—for keeps."

"I'll bet you tell that to all the ghouls!"

I drawled.

He threw me a sneer and Wheeler unlocked the door for me.

I went down the corridor and parked in Bonita's rooms. I was worried about the dark-haired, gray-eyed tidbit from the coffee country. Worried that she might spill about Lorch and Candell and tie me into the Sanchez bump.

All Mullin had to do was consult Department records and find out that I had handed my right name to Patrolman Hagen several night previous. And in Lorch's apartment!

I lit a cigarette and did a lot of thinking. Mullin couldn't hold Bonita as anything except a witness. It didn't argue that she had dealt Alfredo's death card. From what I had seen it had taken more power than the little lovely possessed to crack Sanchez's skull.

Who? Maybe Babbitt. Or Rico? I threw that one away. Rico was up at Jack Gavit's and that let him out. Maybe Dewey Lorch? Lorch had heaved a vase at me, almost making a tunnel of my head. The Sanchez thing was about the same caliber. It could, I decided, very easily be Lorch. Motive? That stuck me. I was still trying to figure it out when I heard Larry Hartley at the corridor door.

"No trouble at all, Senorita," the big ape was saying. "A pleasure. Now don't you worry about anything. It's going to be all right. You get a good sleep and forget it."

"Sleep!" Bonnie said under her breath.

I stepped out of eye-range when the door opened. I didn't want Hartley to see me there. Bonnie shut the door, turned the key, and let her lips part when I stepped back into view.

I put a warning finger over my mouth. I listened at the door until Larry's Number Twelve footfalls faded out down the corridor.

"Poor Alfredo!" Tears brimmed in Bonita's gray eyes.

"Who did it?" I said.

She sank down on a chair, shaking her head.

"I don't know, Johnny. That man—the captain—he told Harry he was arresting him! He has arrested Harry for Alfredo's murder! Why should he do that? Why should Harry have killed Alfredo?"

"I don't know. Did he?"

SHE drew a breath. An uneven, rasping little breath.

"Alfredo was his friend. Harry liked him. Harry would do anything for Senor Sanchez."

I shrugged. "Maybe he did! Let it go." I got up and went around to her chair. "What I want to know is what happened the other morning when I called you. When you 'senored' me and hung up?"

"I couldn't help it. He—they—"

"Told you to give me the chill? Don't you think it's the proper spot to do a little talking? I took a nasty bang on the head for you. Remember?"

She stretched out a hand and touched my arm. Her eyes were still tragic. Perhaps it wasn't the right moment to use the spurs. But I wanted to know. I had to know.

"What have they got on you?" I persisted.

"They know—something. A secret!"

"And you can't tell me?"

"Not now! Johnny, I can't—really!"

"It must be important." I reached for a cigarette. "A real clam if you're afraid to spill to a friend. Maybe I have a slight idea of the picture." When she looked at me inquiringly, I said, "You're not a real Brazilian."

I heard her smothered exclamation.

"I figured it the first day," I said. "That delightful accent of yours. It slipped slightly, when you met Lorch and Candell. When you got scared. It's done the same thing several times since." I laughed. "The real article doesn't do that."

"I'm half Brazilian," she said defensively. "My mother was born in Brazil."

"And you hail from Brooklyn?"

She shook her dark head. "From this city. I went to Rio two years ago. To visit some relatives. I got a job there. I stayed. Then I met Alfredo."

"What's your right name?"

"Bonita Lawson."

"And all this hooks up with Lorch's threat?" I said slowly.

She nodded. "Yes."

"You can't—and won't—tell me how?"

"No."

"But you can tell me this." I mashed the cigarette out. "The other night, when we went up to call on your vase-hurling friends, you phoned the police after they left the apartment?"

The gray eyes looked into mine. "The

first chance I had, Johnny! I was so worried about you! It was all my fault. I had to."

"Thanks," I said, and got up.

There wasn't anything else to gab about. So I said good night and ducked out without letting the cop Mullin had stationed at the doorway of the suite occupied by the late Mr. Sanchez, notice me.

The Bonita angle was a little clearer. I wondered what the good-looking *senorita's* secret was. I made up my mind to find out in the not too distant future. I was still mulling it over when I hit the pad, in my own bedroom, and grabbed four hours of oblivion.

Next morning I took all the metropolitan newspapers into my favorite cafeteria. The *Orbit*, with the story I had phoned in from the Wilshire, was the only one that mentioned me as finding the murdered South American. Not a line, not a credit in any of the other sheets.

Captain Mullin had studiously avoided using my name when he had given the story to the press.

It was a little after ten o'clock then. I left the papers for the next customer, paid my coffee-and-cake fee and headed down to the office.

Wheaton flagged me as I went in. Beth looked excited.

"You've got company!" Her voice was full of caution. "He's been waiting ten minutes."

"Don't tell me. Let me guess."

She didn't. "It's Captain Mullin from Headquarters!" she said. "He looks sore enough to snap on the cuffs, Johnny. Don't forget to do something for me before you go. Tell me what prison so I can send my tear-stained notes to you."

THE captain occupied a chair beside my desk. He didn't seem particularly happy. He champed on three-quarters of a cigar, looking at the confusion around him with faint interest. His expression changed when I barged up.

"Good morning, Captain," I said brightly.

"What's good about it?" Mullin's colorless eyes roamed over me. "What are you so cheerful about?"

"The fact you very carefully kept me out of the Sanchez items. Thoughtful of you, Mullin. So you've got the valet under lock and key? That's a mistake. Babbitt didn't do it."

"Yeah? How do you know?"

I shrugged. "Intuition, probably. That sensitive sixth sense you wouldn't know anything about. What's on your mind?"

I sat down and waited. Mullin cleared his throat. He dropped his cold weed in a cuspidor and rubbed his lantern jaw.

CHAPTER V

GREEN MOUSE

"You're right, Castle." His tone changed. "Mebbe it's the valet, mebbe not. Anyway, I haven't got enough on Babbitt to make it stick. The first good lip he gets will throw it out the window. No motive—no prints—nothing."

"Only suspicion because he happened to be in the suite. No good."

"That's what I'm telling you." He looked hurt.

"And you want some advice? You want to know if I've dug anything? You're willing to bury the hatchet—not in me—and come around to see what I've got up my sleeve besides the two freckles near my elbow. Fair enough. I don't know anything."

Mullin blinked. "You've been seeing a lot of that dame Sanchez was engaged to. You've been around there plenty. You've got an idea. You must have."

It was a spot for a secret gloat. Captain Fred Mullin, frankly stumped, calling on me for assistance. I began to love every minute of it. He knew it, too.

"Look, Castle," he said. "I'll tell you something I turned up. It's confidential. You know Benny Radmann?"

"The bookie?"

"That's right. Well, day before yesterday this Harry Babbitt laid six grand at three-to-one on Rico to win the Borden mill. The dough's in Radmann's safe right now."

"Tch, tch! Gambling! Captain, I'm surprised."

"Where does the Lores gal fit?" he growled.

"I haven't the faintest idea. This is one time I can't offer you a clue. I don't know who smeared the senor. To be candid, I don't care—too much. It's your own private little headache so make the best of it."

"Punk!" Mullin grated. "Wait'll you ask me a favor. See how much cooperation you get!"

"Hm!" I leaned back in my chair and grinned amiably. "You'd give your right eye, and throw in a leg to make it even, to find me mixed in this thing. Mixed enough so you could slap me into the clink like you did Babbitt."

He got up.

"You don't know anything?"

"From nothing, Captain dear. Sorry. Be seeing you around town."

He waddled away without further comment. A second later the telephone on my desk rang.

"What did you do to him, Johnny?" Beth cooed. "He came in like a lion and he went out like a lamb, six red points a pound! Ain't you ashamed—kicking the Law around?"



HAT Mullin had divulged concerning the six-thousand-dollar bet Harry Babbitt had placed on Young Juan Rico didn't seem unduly significant. It might have been Sanchez's dough. I toyed with the information for a minute or two, then shrugged it off.

What I had said to the captain about not being too interested in the identity of the party who had cracked the coffee planter's skull was more or less true. What I wanted to find out was the hold Dewey Lorch had on Bonita Lores-Lawson.

I wanted to learn that for two good reasons. One, because of the bump on the head Lorch had presented me with. Two, for the reason that I had been in on the thing from the day Bonnie had flown in from California. I wanted to follow through. I didn't like leaving loose ends around, untied, unexplained.

But how?

How, with Bonita muzzled? How, with not a thing in the world to hang on either Lorch or Candell? And how, without any definite lead, anything to go on?

The making of a great metropolitan newspaper revolved about me. The presses rumbled. War news poured in from every capital in the world. All was activity, hustle and speed. And I sat there like a bum on a log, thinking about a girl with gray eyes, a punk with a fummy, crinkle-skinned pan and another slug with a round, moony mush.

I had a little work to do. A squib about Artie Borden, down in Asbury Park, running off his roadwork on the beach. I reached in an inner pocket for a pencil and pulled out some other stuff with it.

Two letters. Not addressed to me, but to Dewey Lorch! The correspondence I had lifted from the desk in Apt. 5B because it was faintly interesting at the time. I'd forgotten about them.

The first letter was from the Peerless Dry Cleaners on Amsterdam Avenue—"Your Suit Will Suit If We Clean It." The note was a dun for six bucks Lorch had owed for three months. Would he please pay, and so forth?

I threw that in the trash and took the enclosure out of the second envelope.

This was better. It said:

Dear Dew:

I was talking to Patsy Kline yesterday. He says he's interested. He's got a building in back of the Green Mouse that's a natural for your purpose. Make a swell card and dice

room. Private entrance, etc. Used to be a stable, but now a garage.

Why don't you stop in and see Patsy? Let me know how you make out.

Yours truly,

Ray Gordon

P.S. I'm writing on account of never being able to get you on the telephone.

I read it over. Pasty Kline. Green Mouse. That wasn't as tough as it sounded on the surface.

A telephone directory turned up both.

Patrick Kline was listed at an address off Greenwich Street, on the fringe of the village. The Green Mouse, an eatery, was under the G's at the same phone number, the same address. . . .

It was after eight that evening when I got out of the subway at Sheridan Square and walked south. Carmody Street, a sliver between two avenues, ran crookedly east and west. It was a typical Greenwich Village alley old as time and just as drab and dusty.

The war had brought popularity back to the Village haunts, the cafés and creeps, the better places. They were all making coin as was any place on the thirteen-mile island that had a liquor license and served food that tasted like food.

The Green Mouse, in a two-story ancient brick edifice, slouched at the end of the alley. It boasted a doorman. His job seemed to be to tell the patrons there was a thirty-five cent parking lot two streets away. He didn't have to tell me so I went on in, left my headgear in the charge of a peroxide-tinted little chick who gave me a soiled cardboard number and a toothpaste smile.

"New around here, aren't you?" she inquired.

"The paint's still wet, honey."

I put the hat check in my pocket and passed into the bar.

It was jammed. The military, the boys who sailed the Seven Seas, civilians, weary war workers trying to snatch an hour's fun out of a day that had kept them at high tension and top speed.

My secret mission to the Green Mouse was to get a gander at the building in the rear, the one Lorch's correspondent had mentioned in the purloined note. The letter was postmarked ten days previous. By this time Dewey Lorch and Lou Candell might be in business there.

I HAD a wine-cooler. I sipped it slowly, keeping a weather eye for anyone I might know. They were all unfamiliar faces around me.

Time passed.

Back in the restaurant part of the Mouse I ordered a large cannibal sandwich—raw

chopped beef, raw chopped onion. An hour dragged by. I had about decided it was time to slip out and take a peek at the place that was once a stable, but which at present kept all horsepower under hoods, when I saw Dewey Lorch come in.

He wore a light blue Palm Beach suit, no hat and white buck sports shoes. He strolled into the bar and bought himself a beer. I noticed him give the clock over the pyramid of glasses frequent glances. Just to make sure he wouldn't lamp me through the open doorway of the restaurant section, I hid my features behind a much thumbled menu.

Lorch finished his beer and walked past the main chow division. Over the top of the menu I saw him open a door in the rear, pass through and close it after him.

"Anything else, sir?"

"My check," I told the waiter.

I waited for change, left a tip on his brass dish, got my hat from Blondie and slipped her fifteen cents.

"Stop in again sometime," she suggested.

"I'll do that."

She smiled. I smiled. Then I tried to give a passable imitation of a gent who knew where he was going, opened the door Lorch had opened, stepped out and into a cobbled court and clicked the door shut behind me.

It took a minute or more for my eyes to get accustomed to the gloom.

Then I saw the ex-stable directly across the courtyard, toward the rear. A high board fence enclosed the yard. Garbage cans stood in a tier to the left. A sleek gray cat, with a strong stomach, was making its selection. It flattened its ears as I went by, and spat at me.

No lights were visible in the garage. It was designed for four cars. Each had an individual overhead steel door. An outside flight of stairs on the east side led up to the floor above. Over that I noticed another series of dark windows.

The end overhead door was halfway up, with an empty space for a car beyond. I walked in on the cement floor, breathed faint gas and oil fumes, and discovered a door at the end of a work-bench. It was unlocked. I eased the china knob over, pushed the door open a little and saw a second flight of stairs.

I listened.

It was hard to hear anything. Echoes from the other building made a noisy monotone. Grumble of voices, clatter of dishes in the kitchen, the metallic grind of some electrically propelled machine—a dishwasher possibly, or a ventilator—made a constant rumble.

I felt to make sure the automatic I had brought along was still with me. It was.

So I went up the stairs warily, taking time and wondering if this was as screwy as crashing Lorch's apartment had been that other night.

A narrow hall led away from the top of the staircase.

No lights visible from outside, but a glow over the transoms of three doors along the aisle. I listened again, catching some conversation that came from the first lighted transom, sharply to my right.

"There's not much business until the theaters empty out," one voice said. "You drop in from eleven-thirty on and you get plenty of action."

"It's a gold-mine," another voice said. "The cops leave you alone and Patsy's particular about who he sends over."

"I'll stick around and see what the play is tonight," a third voice said. "If it looks good I'll wire my partner to come on."

That wasn't getting me anything.

None of the voices had belonged to Lorch. I walked on down the hall. I hadn't any set plan in mind. I had just an idea I wanted to meet Dewey Lorch and make him talk. An automatic made a swell vocal stimulant. I was determined to get to the bottom of the shut-up he and Lou Candell had put on Bonita.

There were two doors, facing each other, at the end of the narrow corridor. Two doors and two dark rooms. I was turning to wander back, when I stopped moving.

SOME people were coming up the outside stairs. I could hear them talking. Simultaneously, the door of one of the lighted rooms across from me began to open. Someone was about to come out in the hall.

I faded back into the murk of the shadowy room whose open door I stood beside. With my foot I eased the door gently shut. Starlight came in through a high window. It showed me a table and chairs, a buffet, a horsehair couch, a connecting serving room and, to the right, the slinky drape of a cretonne curtain.

I pushed that aside. Behind it was a cubicle used for storing empty bottles, trays. The next minute I heard Dewey Lorch, not a half a dozen feet away, speaking.

"I'm in here, Abe. You wait around downstairs. He ought to be back any time."

"I hear a car now," someone answered him from further down the hall.

"See if it's Lou. See if he needs any help."

The door I had shut creaked open. A click turned on wall lights. It came half a second after I had shoved the cretonne curtain aside and stepped in behind it.

Through a hole in the drape I had a moth's-eye view of Lorch. He took his

Palm Beach suit over to the buffet. There were a lot of bottles and glasses there. Lorch looked the assortment over and poured himself a drink.

After that he opened a drawer, took out a gun and sat down with it at the end of the table.

Two minutes at least ticked away before I knew what it was all about. Footsteps came down the hall. The swish of clothing rubbing against a wall outside. Then I heard Lou Candell's flat, uninteresting voice, saying:

"Inside, folks. Make yourself to home."

I moved my eye from Lorch to the door.

Through it came three people. Young Juan Rico, natty and sullen-faced, black eyes dangerous and his lips curved in a sneer. Lou Candell was behind him, and beside Bonita Lores. Candell in slacks and a hound's tooth sports jacket that made no impression on me.

I looked hard and long at the pretty Bonita. Fear was in her face again, etched there indelibly and accented by the terror in her wide-eyed gaze. Her coral lips were parted and the slim hand belonging to the arm Candell gripped, shook like dancing leaves on a breeze-stirred tree.

"Any trouble?" Lorch asked.

"Nope." There was a modest note in Candell's admission. "They were both right where you said they'd be—at that funeral parlor. I had to wait a half hour for them to come out. Ray was a big help. He eased them over to the car. He sat in the back with them while I drove 'em down. Not a hitch anywhere."

Lorch grinned. "Shut the door. I crave conversation with the little guy!"

CHAPTER VI

SKELETONS RATTLE



ICO'S burning gaze shifted from Dewey Lorch's taunting grin to the rod on the table before the man. Bonita sank down in a chair. Candell took up a position a foot or so away, his hand deep in his sports coat pocket.

"What do you want?" Rico snapped. Anger didn't make his English too understandable.

"You!" Lorch laughed. "Smart little operator, aren't you? Running around, fracturing skulls and thinking you can get away with it!"

I felt my ears go up. That was news! Rico didn't give me much time to analyze it. He ripped out a string of Spanish curses.

"Don't blow yourself out," Lorch advised, lazily. "I'll do the talking—you listen. You killed Sanchez. Your gal friend over there

said she saw you last night at the hotel—saw you in Sanchez's rooms! But she didn't tell the cops that, and I think I know why."

Rico swung around to Bonita. The girl had covered her face with her hands. He snarled something at her in his mother tongue and the hands came away from the beautiful face.

"They made me tell them, Juan!" She was crying. "They know everything!"

Lou Candell chuckled. "You bet we know everything. Tell them about Gavitty, Dew."

"I phoned Jack," Lorch continued. "Just to make sure. Gavitty said you copped a sneak out last night at ten-thirty. Okay. You rubbed Sanchez because you're in love with this dame, because the fat guy was getting wise to it and had knocked you around plenty. Remember the day you blew in at the airport? With the shiner and the cut lip? That wasn't done with mirrors—it was Sanchez's big fists!"

Some of Rico's rage melted. I saw him move his shoulders, as if what Lorch was saying was too much to buck.

"What do you want?" he asked, throatily.

"Now you're being sensible, bud. Sit down."

"I'll stand."

"Anyway you like. But pay attention. We're not coppers, so we don't care who you kill after hours. That's no gravy off your vests. But you've got to be taught a lesson. You've got to be taught that it costs money to be a murderer and walk around free."

"I haven't got money," Rico answered.

"Don't hand me that line, monkey! You gave Sanchez's valet a wad to bet on you. You promised him half the profits if he kept his trap shut about seeing you last night. He's out, by the way. The cops unlocked him a couple of hours ago."

"How do you know?"

"We've got a private wire to Headquarters," Lorch said, with another short laugh. "Didn't Lou tell you we know everything?"

"How much?" the fighter said shortly.

I waited with Rico for the amount. Dewey Lorch's parchmentlike face wrinkled until it looked like a local road map. He pulled down the lobe of his left ear and pulled air through his teeth.

"Ten G's for a starter," he said. "Your end of the first purse, win, lose or draw, will leave you plenty even after Morgenthau gets his cut. It's cheap, kid. Much better than sizzling on sparks. What do you say?"

Rico's answer was surprising to say the least.

He put it into action rather than words. With one sinuous, forward lunge he grabbed the gun from the end of the table,

snaring it before Lorch could get his chair back on an even keel!

Rico ripped out another oath and slapped a left hook to the Lorch button. Dewey's chair tipped over backward and Lorch rolled out on the floor.

Rico aimed a kick at the man's head, an instant before Candell began to move. Lou's gun slid into his hand. But before he could use it Rico winged him in the shoulder with as nice a piece of shooting as I had seen outside a Coney Island gallery.

The little lightweight angled the shot from the vicinity of his knee and Candell thumped against the wall, grabbing for his holed shoulder. Bonita screamed, jumped up and ran toward the drape of the cretonne curtain behind which I stood, my own gat in firing position.

CANDELL'S wound was in his left shoulder. It didn't affect his right hand noticeably. That came up, his rod leveling ominously. Before Rico could shoot again Candell started squeezing the trigger.

One—two—three—four shots, so fast they sounded almost like one! At point-blank range he couldn't miss—and didn't. Rico's slender figure twitched as each slug ripped into him. For sixty seconds he stood with his hands up and out, as if he were in the ring looking for an opening.

Then, as if his legs had been disconnected at the knees, he folded and pitched face-down, caroming off the edge of the table like a bag of damp sawdust.

Lorch got up. He remembered to brush himself off.

"Get the dame!" he yelled. "We're getting out of here!"

Candell, blood coming out from under his cuff and trickling down the back of his left hand, made a bee-line for Bonita. I swept the length of cretonne aside and put in an Act Three climax appearance.

"All right, boys! Stand where you are and don't make a move!"

"Johnny!" Bonita gasped.

Her own symmetrical gambis partially gave way, and incautiously, I caught my foot in the edge of the rug. It threw me slightly off balance and gave the eagle-eyed Candell his opportunity. I struck the framework of the door as Candell's heater barked venomously. Lead whined past my face, so close I could almost feel the heat of it.

My shot got him in the leg. He chucked the gun at me. I ducked that better than I had the vase. But there was still Lorch—still Dewey Lorch coming head-on in my direction.

The gun jammed, as guns sometimes do in the movies at critical moments. I didn't even have time to reverse it and use the butt before he leaped at me.

We went down, wrapped around and around in the cretonne curtain like a pair of mummies. Only not so still. Lorch's frantic hands clawed at my throat. There was plenty of power in his fingers. Steel-like, pistonlike fingers, searching and grabbing for vulnerable spots.

Hazily I saw his dried-out pan, criss-crossed with the non-effaceable wrinkles, swimming before me. I felt his breath—hot, fetid. I tried to roll him, but he was too smart for that old stevedore trick. He spread his legs wider, making them a vise over me and began hammering my head up and down on the floor.

That was fun.

With every bump more colored lights than shone on Broadway made a rainbow around me. The pain was agonizing. I wondered how many cracks it would take before my head split in half.

Then a shadow came between the wall lights and Lorch's contorted face. Bonnie. Bonita, with one of the loose guns in the room, bludgeoning Lorch! It was a welcome intervention, doubly so because he stopped banging my skull and grabbed one of her trim, liquid-stockinged ankles. He jerked at it as I squirmed partially out from under, got an arm around his neck and a thumb at the corner of his most convenient eyeball.

I squeezed, and that did it!

Lorch let go of Bonita. He let go of me. He reached up to push his eye back in place and the blaze from Rio shoved me the gun. I jammed it over Lorch's palpitating heart, shook my head to clear it and got up, dragging him with me by the lapels of the pretty blue Palm Beach jacket.

"Hey! What goes on? What is all this?"

The door had opened and through the knot of interested spectators in the hall a large patrolman had elbowed his way in. Not my old friend Hagen, but a bird of the same plumage. Just to make it even for the vase he had laid me low with, I hit Lorch with the butt of the gun—an accurate, spiteful smack an inch above his left ear. That made me feel a lot better.

I dropped the gun to the table and turned to the bluecoat. He was busy counting corpses, one, anyway.

"Look, friend," I managed to say. "You don't understand all this, but Fred Mullin,

down at your recreation center, will. Be a pal and give him a buzz. Tell him Johnny Castle's up here with the solution to his most recent murder mystery. If he says how come, tell him it's the salmon in me—struggling to get upstream!"

I WENT uptown in a taxi with Bonita Lawson alias Lores.

"All this for nothing," she said. "It will come out in the papers anyway."

"The power of the press, babe. The moral is don't hide skeletons in your closets. Give them to the bone drive."

She shivered, looking at the sailing summer moon. I waited until we crossed Twenty-third Street, still going north.

"My picture career, my contract—everything ruined now!" she cried softly.

"Not necessarily. Pistol packin' mamas are having a vogue at the moment. While we're talking about the cinema, you can answer a question or two. Information, please. I have a faint idea that what Lorch had on you blends in with the fillum industry. Or doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Give, honey. What was the threat?"

"To tell everybody—New Era Pictures, principally—not only that I was a phony Brazilian, but that my dad, Marty Lawson, is doing a twenty-year stretch for forgery in one of the prisons where Lorch spent some time!"

So that was it!

I patted her softly rounded arm.

"Cheer up. Even that isn't going to stop you. Don't you know Hollywood lives and breathes on picture stars' private scandals? You'll go on to be a big sensation, no matter if you hail from Rio or East Fracture, Dakota, either one. This publicity will be a shot in the arm. Wait and see. And when your old man gets out of stir you can be smart and write all the checks for him."

Four more streets and I saw a familiar corner. I told the driver to slow, and reached for the door.

"Johnny! When—"

She got out in front of the Wilshire. In the shine of the street lamps she looked like an angel. A little worn around the wings, but pulse-quickenning, anyway.

"Be hungry around one tomorrow," I told her, "and I'll take you out to lunch!"

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ON SALE AT ALL STANDS



The Duke whirled,
caught my right
on his up-flung
arm

COP-SHY

By O. DENNIS

Jimmie North was a wanted man—when he got through the job of rounding up a gang of criminals!

THE knock at the hall door was loud, hard. It must have been, for me to hear it above the sound of my electric shaver as it buzzed along my jaw, and filled the bathroom with its steady whine.

I turned from the mirror and frowned across the living room. Then I put the finishing touches on my Clark Gable before pulling the cord from the wall outlet, silencing the shaver.

The knock was even louder this time, followed by a violent rattling of the door-knob. I stomped across the room and jerked it open.

"Say," I started, "what in—"

I dropped back a step as a big guy crowded into the room and I looked up into a pair of ice-blue eyes. His face looked vaguely familiar and I was trying to place him.

"Listen, fellah," he said, tapping my

chest with a hard forefinger, "whatever it is you're doing to raise hobs with my radio reception, cut it out!" His chin jutted and his wide shoulders hunched forward beneath the faded bathrobe. "Do you get it?" he insisted. "Don't do it any more!"

I drew myself up to my full five-foot-nine and shoved my fresh-shaved chin up close to his red-stubbed one.

"Okay. Now you listen to me," I retorted hotly. "I'll run my shaver if it shuts down the broadcasting station. I pay my rent here and—"

"Yah, and I pay my rent right next door!" The big redhead jerked a thumb toward the apartment at the rear.

"Well, you can just flag your hide back to where you pay your rent and I'll shave every night and three times on Sunday if I take the notion!"

"If you do, I'll come over and slap your ears down," he raged. "And that's a promise."

"The heck you will. The law—"

"Now, see here," he stopped me, "I'm not hiding behind my shield or the fact that I'm Sergeant Pat Kelly of Homicide." He said it like anyone should know who he was. "This is strictly personal."

"Oh," I said, "you—you're a detective." Now I did know who he was. I remem-

bered all in a rush where I'd seen that face.

"Yeah, I'm a detective—on the go for three days and nights in a row, trying to run down a gang of kill-crazy stick-up punks. I come home and try to grab a wink of shut-eye with one ear glued to the short-wave and then you start up that howling buzz-saw."

"But I—I didn't know that," I stammered. "I was only—"

"Well, you know it now," Pat Kelly growled. "And the next time—"

"It won't happen again," I assured him. But Sergeant Pat Kelly wasn't listening. He had turned around on a slippered heel and marched stiff-kneed to his own apartment.

Watching until he disappeared, I closed my door softly.

A cop, and living right next door! My fingers fumbled for a cigarette. "A gang of kill-crazy stick-up punks," Kelly had said. In my own mind, I added ruefully, "And how well I know it."

I rubbed my knee, the one that was nicked by a bullet intended for one of the bank employees on that day, several months before, when the "Duke" and his sidekicks, Monk and Rocco, held up the Merchants Trust Company. Before the bluecoats got there, the gang was gone,

No Mother's Pies for those G.I.'s — But —

NATURALLY, you mothers and wives and sisters would like to be over there seeing to it that your boys have that good home cooking. For it's a long jump from K rations to strawberry shortcake.

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leaving a vice-president and cashier dead, and me, the only customer at the time, half-conscious on the white-tiled floor.

While I was still in the hospital I got a couple of very nasty notes telling me what would happen if I testified against, or tried to identify, the killers. So I'd given the cops the slip, changed my name and my job, and hoped they would forget about me, all of them.

BUT Kelly hadn't recognized me, I reflected, because he'd only seen me a couple of times. I knew the thing for me to do was to get out of town, but I didn't want to leave. I had just begun to find myself. I had a good job. And then there was another reason, working right in the same office with me—Margaret.

Margaret isn't pretty exactly, having a small, boyish kind of face with a freckle-spattered nose and a hair-do she calls a feather bob. But there the small-boy resemblance ceases. Her figure—well, I call her a vest-pocket Venus.

Suddenly I remembered that I had a date with her at eight-thirty. Breaking all previous records for fast changing, I shrugged into my coat, snapped out the light and was off.

Over coffee in our favorite back-corner booth in the little restaurant, I jumped right into the middle of the thing I wanted to tell Margaret.

"Listen, honey," I blurted out, "we've had a lot of fun, you and I, going around together and—I'm going to miss you a lot."

"What do you mean, miss me?" she questioned. "I'm not going any place."

"No, but I am."

"Oh!" Recovering from her surprise, she asked, "Where? And—and why?"

"I just made up my mind tonight," I told her. "You see there's a police detective lives right in the next apartment. And they're looking for me, the cops are. The stick-up gang, too. That's why I'm going. But where, I haven't decided."

"Jimmie, wait a minute," Margaret begged, "let's go back to the beginning. Why are the police looking for you? And this stick-up gang. Where do they fit in?"

"Remember when the Merchant's Trust was held up and robbed back in the spring? They killed a couple of men."

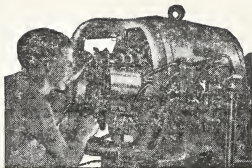
"I read about it in the papers. But what—"

Then I told her the whole story.

"And me," I finished, "I was the innocent bystander, witnessed the whole show, ringside."

"But, Jimmie," she said frowning across at me, "what you did was no crime. Why are you running away from the police?"

[Turn page]



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"It's not only the cops. You see, some wise-guy reporter got hold of the story that I was going to identify the hold-up men from rogue's gallery pictures. Those killers are ready to rub me out the minute I'm located."

"So you're leaving town?"

"Uh huh."

"And those men can go on, robbing and killing people?"

I nodded dumbly, and then I saw something go out of her eyes. She slid out of the booth.

"Well, you may be just a rolling stone, Jimmie," she said, "but I'm still a working girl. Got to be at the switchboard at eight in the morning."

At the door of her home Margaret turned to me and put out her hand.

"So long, Jimmie," she said, "and good luck."

"I wish I didn't have to say good-by."

"I know. But there always have to be good-bys. I knew it would happen to us, only—"

"Only you thought you'd be seeing me off to an army camp," I cut in fiercely, "and you could be proud of me, fighting for my country. I know you've wondered why I wasn't in the service."

"Of course I've wondered, Jimmie, but I thought there must be a good reason."

"All right, I'll tell you," I came back bitterly. "I was in, and got wounded. My shoulder never healed properly and they said I'd have to be operated on some day."

Whatever I expected her to say to that, I was disappointed. She glanced at her wrist-watch and turned to the door.

"I hope things will be better for you sometime," she said. Then she was gone, the door closing firmly behind her.

I drove home slowly, parked in front of my building and climbed the stairs. I decided to pack up and leave at once, trying to tell myself that I was afraid I'd run into Kelly again if I waited 'til morning.

But in the back of my mind I knew that if I didn't go quickly, I'd keep thinking of Margaret and do something rash, like going to Kelly and telling him that I was ready to play hero—and all because of a freckle-nosed girl that didn't give a hang about me.

Snapping on the light, I stopped short. A Tommy-gun was pointed straight at my belt-buckle. My stomach did a nip-up behind the buckle and I looked up at the thick-necked man perched on the corner of the table, coddling the gun in his long arms.

I wanted to run, but my knees were suddenly rubbery. I turned and looked square into the muzzle of a big automatic. My eyes swiveled upward, away from the menace of the gun.

"The Duke!" I heard myself whisper.

"Yeah, it's the Duke. Thought you'd give us the runaround, huh?" The gun jabbed forward, grinding into my stomach. "But wait 'til the coppers come looking for their star stoolie."

"Leave me have 'im, Duke," the ape-man said hopefully, "an' we can scam outa here."

"No, Monk," a soft voice hissed close behind me. "I do it quiet, an' dis time it's for sure."

I FELT the prick of a knife-point below my shoulder-blade. Twisting around I looked into the hard-polished brown eyes of the third member of the stick-up team.

"Rocco's right, Monk," the Duke said. "We're plenty hot awready. No use tip-pin' the cops where we take with another shootin' party. We'll take care of—"

"Listen, you guys," I cut in, "if you think I'm working with the police, you're crazy. That's who I'm hiding out from. I've got a different job now, changed my name and—"

"Say—that gives me a new angle." The Duke's eyes narrowed craftily. "That is, if you're on the level about that. Yeah, maybe it's lucky for me that I didn't burn you down when I spotted you on the street the other day and tailed you up here."

"Sure, I'll play along," I piped up quickly, realizing that I had about as much chance as a non-Aryan in the Reich.

"Okay, Rocco, put away your shiv for now," the Duke ordered. "Well, here's the lay of things," he said, pushing me into a chair. "We pulled a theater box-office job tonight, see; cooled the cashier and a couple of witnesses. We got away, but a prowl car picked up our trail, so we had to ditch the car. Here we was, practicley in your front yard, so we figured to stop it for a quick call, see. But now—"

"Ya, what we gonna do now?" Monk put in from his perch on the table.

The Duke ignored him and went on talking to me.

"Seein's the cops don't know where you are holed up, I make it we camp here 'til the heat's off."

"I get it." So this was only a temporary reprieve, not a full pardon. But it might give me time to work out something.

"But remember, keep your nose clean or—" He patted the gun under his arm.

The next morning I said casually, "I have to be at the office at nine, you know. I'm working on a special report for the auditors and if I don't show up the boss is apt to come here looking for me."

"Report, nothin'," the Duke said. "And if your boss does come up here, I'll take care of him."

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"I could call him up," I said, crossing to the desk. "I could tell him I'm sick or something."

The Duke got there as quick as I did.

"It's an idea," he snarled, "only I'll do the talking. No chance for any funny business then."

I listened dejectedly while he talked.

"Yeah, he's pretty bad," he said. The concern in his voice sounded almost real. "It started last night. Indigestion, the doc says. Who me? Oh, I'm a friend of his."

Okay, I'll tell him."

"Say," he breathed, dropping the phone on its cradle and turning to me, "that dame is sure some nosy. Your boss ain't in yet, see, so I gives the message to the babe at the switchboard. Then she wants to know all about it."

A little after nine, I heard the tap of a girl's heels along the hall outside. I held my breath as they slowed and stopped at my door. A light knock sounded and the Duke stabbed a quick look at me.

"Who's that?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper.

I shrugged and shook my head.

The knock was repeated, and this time she called out.

"Jimmie! It's me, Margaret. I've got to see you."

WE WAITED, the four of us, listening. Then she called again.

"Jimmie, I know you're home. I saw your car parked down in the street. If you don't let me in I'll call the police."

"Let her in," the Duke ordered. "Tell her we're friends of yours, see. Then get rid of her in a hurry."

After Monk had disappeared into the bedroom with his precious tommy-gun and the Duke had slipped into his coat to cover his shoulder-harness, he gave me the nod and I opened the door.

"Jimmie," Margaret said in evident surprise, "what are you doing up? I thought you were sick." Looking past me, she saw the Duke. "Oh, is this the man who telephoned?"

"Uh huh, friend of mine. Sorry you can't come in, but I—"

But then she was in. She smiled at the Duke.

"How do you do," she said sweetly. "I'm glad to meet anyone who's a friend of Jimmie's." She dropped her purse and newspaper on the table and turned to me. "Shouldn't you be in bed? I believe I'll stay right here and look after you."

"That just wouldn't be the thing to do," I said, taking her arm and escorting her to the door. "No, darling," I said flatly, "you can't stay."

"But I'm worried about you and I—Oh,

(Continued on page 75)

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HOBNAILS

By MARY H. SHANNON

The storm brings two fugitives to Granny's cabin!



COULD we come in, ma'am, and get warm?"

Through the warily widened doorway the old woman peered out at the two men standing drenched and shivering on her doorstep. One hand, grasping the collar of a small black dog beside her, felt the neck ruff bristle instinctively.

"Tray!" she reproved,

her hold on the collar tightening.

She hesitated, glanced apprehensively behind her at the row of hobnailed boots standing against the wall of the cabin.

"Mebbe—if you come in real quiet," she whispered. "My man and boys, they never could bide to be woken once they got to sleep. Powerful hard work with the logs, it is."

The two storm-driven refugees hesitated, their furtive eyes darting to the rough boots, then to a ladder leading up to a loft.

"If you come in real quiet," repeated the old woman. "I couldn't turn a dog away a night like this."

The warmth of the cracked and glowing stove drew the shivering men irresistibly. Slipping off their sodden shoes they advanced into the room, leaving wet tracks and a trail of drops from the door to the stove. The dog's eyes followed them uneasily. He looked anxiously up at the woman. She spoke to him reassuringly, and he lay down on a sack under the damper.

The men cowered over the stove, rubbing numbed hands, holding up soaked and shaking feet to the warmth. The teeth of both were chattering, and the thinner of the two shook as if in the throes of a chill.

But again and again their eyes, like those of a hunted rat, darted from the opening where the ladder passed through the ceiling to the great hobnailed boots against the wall. Those boots suggested power, brutal strength, a cruel virility.

"Best take off your clothes an' dry 'em," suggested the old woman. "Here's some of the men's things to change into. Don't mind me. I'm going to make you some real hot tea."

The two men said nothing. They seemed too spent to do anything but cower over the stove. They did not touch the dry garments she laid near them. Their shifty eyes followed her every movement.

She was like a mouse. One scarcely heard her as she moved about between cupboard and stove. Once when she stood with her back to them one of the men started up, straining to see over her shoulder. But she appeared to be cutting slices from a loaf of bread. Presently she placed food on the bench beside them.

"This'll warm you up," she whispered, then turned to the dog.

"Reckon I'd best send him out to the shed. He's apt to bark if he wakes up sudden an' sees there's strangers here."

AT a word from her the dog followed her to the door. Stooping over him she fumbled a moment with his collar. Then, motioning through the open door out into the black night, she said:

"Go! Go, Tray!"

But though the dog wagged his tail he whimpered and looked at the men, then up into her face beseechingly.

"Go—go, Tray!" she repeated, and her voice shook.

With another wag of his tail the dog disappeared into the wild night. Closing the door quickly the woman turned back into the room, taking the candle from the table.

"I'll be goin' up to bed now," she whispered. "There's wood here. You can keep up the fire if you're real quiet. I'd leave you a candle, but I dursen't."

She glanced warily at the loft above, listened. All was quiet. The men watched her climb the ladder and disappear through the hole into the loft. They listened, crouched, tense, eyes on the ceiling, ready to spring for the door. But after a few light movements above all was quiet save for the drive of wind and rain against the house. The head of the thinner man began to nod.

"'Twas a fool thing to do, eatin' so much," protested the other man. "We're apt to fall asleep an' sleep like logs."

"You know me," his companion assured him. "Least sound an' I'm wide awake."

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guns at unseen hands that clutched at them and dragged them down. Like trapped beasts they fought through mud and rain, blindly, savagely, desperately. Confusedly they heard the barking of a dog, a sharp yelp of pain.

The door of the cabin flew open, the light from a candle held aloft streamed out. The next they knew they were lying on the ground, handcuffed, helpless. Above them stood four men, armed, three in uniform. A small black dog, wet and dragged, crawled tiredly up the steps and lay down at the old woman's feet.

"We got 'em, Granny!" exulted the man in plainclothes. "Just got here in time at that!"

But the old woman's arms were around the dog.

"Oh, Tray, Tray!" she was sobbing hysterically. "He's hurt! He's hurt!"

"Reckon he's got some ribs broke," observed the man. "Some dog, he is! Say, the last of that old bridge trestle was gone, an' he swum the river! Swum it, an' it runnin' like a team of race-horses! It just about done for him, too! When he come into my store last night he could jest wag his tail, then lay down on the floor dead beat. I found the note you put in his collar, like you do when you send him for things. It was soaked so's I could hardly make it out. I brought him back in my arms. Don't feel so bad, Granny. You can take some of that five thousand he pulled in for you last night and doctor him up good."

"Five thousand!" echoed the old woman. "Five thousand dollars!" the storekeeper assured her. "That's the reward out for these two rats. Three bank robberies. Shot the cashier dead in a Bar City bank the other day. Didn't you know?"

"Oh, I suspicioned they'd done something pretty bad," declared the old woman. "But five thousand? And only me an' Tray to—"

The storekeeper looked past her into the cabin.

"Them boots've stood there a mighty long time," he observed. "Most five years since your man and boys was drowned in the river."

"Most five years," was the quavering reply. "But I never could bide to put them boots away. Seemed we was never scared, Tray an' me, all alone here with them boots standin' there agin the wall."



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COP-SHY

(Continued from page 70)

all right," she agreed reluctantly. Just as I was about to close the door on her, she stopped me. "Oh, Jimmie," she said, "my purse and paper."

The Duke picked them up and offered them gallantly.

"Here you are, Gorgeous."

"Thank you so much," Margaret said smiling. Then, as she tucked them under her arm, the newspaper slipped to the floor and flopped open. The headlines glared up at us.

HOLD-UP KILLER RECOGNIZED BY POLICE

And just below were rogue's gallery pictures of the Duke, Rocco and Monk.

"Hey, what—?" The Duke took one quick look, grabbed Margaret's wrist and jerked her back into the room. "Not so fast," he snapped. "Looks like you know too much to be running around loose."

"Look out!" Rocco yelled.

The Duke whirled at the warning, just in time to catch my right on his up-flung arm. But it staggered him.

"Keep your dirty paws off her," I heard myself growl. And there I was following him up doggedly, my fists flying.

He dropped to one knee and came up with his gun in his hand. I tried to dodge but my bad knee twisted and doubled under me. He lashed out and caught me beside the head with the heavy gun-barrel. Stars exploded inside my head and then I plunged to the floor.

But I wasn't out cold. I rolled over and sat up, dazed. The Duke stood over me, gun leveled and death in his muddy eyes. Rocco slid up beside him, his stiletto glinting, and Monk loomed up in the bedroom door with his sub-machine gun gripped in his big hands.

"Should I blast 'im now, Duke?" he asked eagerly.

"Hold it, Monk," the Duke ordered. "I couldn't do it myself, only we gotta wait. Little Miss Smarty, here, almost got away with her dumb-bunny act, and if it hadn't been for that newspaper—"

"What'll we do?" Rocco worried. "We ain't got a car."

"Didn't you hear the dame say the boyfriend's car is parked right down on the street?" the Duke said disgustedly. "We wait 'til dark, then lam. These two, they sit up front just like a couple of lovebirds, see. And we're hid down in back with our gats ready. That'll get us outa town."

It was then I heard heavy footsteps

[Turn page]



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climbing the stairs and hard-heeling along the hall past my door.

Monk and Rocco were beefing about having to spend the whole day cooped up in my apartment, and the Duke had to tell them off. From beyond the thin partition to the next apartment came a radio announcer's voice. Scrambling to my feet, I eased past the still grumbling Monk and Rocco, into the bathroom.

The Duke looked at me curiously but said nothing when I opened the medicine-cabinet, took out my shaver, and began buzzing it along my jaw. The drone of the announcer's voice was suddenly lost in the high-pitched amplification of the shaver's steady whine.

I had barely started trimming at the edge of one sideburn when the stamp of feet sounded in the hall, followed by a heavy-fisted knock at the door.

Whirling, the Duke shot a hard, questioning look at me. His gun appeared again and Rocco and Monk fanned out, watching the door.

"Awright, I'll take care of this mug," he said, stepping to the door and jerking it open. "Whaddya want?" he demanded.

"I told you that the next time—" Pat Kelly stopped and stared at the three men. "Well, I'll be—" Then he went for his gun.

Two shots sounded as one.

I didn't wait to see more. Dropping the shaver on the shelf I stepped into the room, gripped a straight-backed chair, swung it up, and down. It smashed to matchwood on Monk's head and shoulders. He stiffened out on his feet and the tommy-gun stuttered in his hands, stitching holes along the wall and into the bathroom. I heard a crash and my electric shaver went spinning to the floor.

Suddenly Margaret screamed. I turned just in time. Rocco was almost upon me, his stiletto gleaming in a deadly arc.

I caught his brown wrist instinctively with my left hand and the blade stopped inches from my throat.

My hands were trained to fight against fists or guns. I forgot I ever had a bad shoulder. I snapped my right free from his grip, chopped a blow at his knife-wrist. The knife clattered from Rocco's spreading fingers and his eyes went wide. Another blow with the out-edge of my open hand against his upper lip close under his nose, and he went limp. He dropped to the floor, out cold.

I looked toward the hall door. Kelly was stretched out on the floor. The Duke stood over him, still holding his gun, but swaying and clawing at his face with one hand. The bullet from Kelly's gun had furrowed his cheek.

I started for him, but he saw me come.
(Continued on page 78)

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ing. He brought his gun up.
"Stop right there," he snarled, "or I'll fill you fulla lead."
I felt a grin tighten across my teeth. I was sure of myself now and he could go to blazes. Rushing at him, I caught his right hand in both of mine, ducked under his arm, half turned away from him and doubled forward. The Duke went up and over, landed full on his face and lay still.

IT WAS all over now but the paddy-wagon. Kelly, white-faced but conscious, pushed up on one elbow.

"Nice going, North." He grinned up at me.

"Then you knew who I was all the time?" I said, plenty surprised.

"Nope," he replied, "never tumbled 'til last night. But when you acted so cop-shy and scared, I checked on the license plates on your car. Then I knew you was the Jimmie North we was needin' six months ago."

"If you still need me, I'm ready to go down to Headquarters now."

"No, I guess these mugs have pretty well identified themselves. And the law will put them where you won't have to worry about them any more."

Then Margaret's arms were around me. "Jimmie!" she exclaimed, "are you all right? You're not hurt?"

"Only a little shaky," I confessed.

"Oh, Jimmie! I'm so sorry I doubted you! I—"

"I'd like to tell you, Miss," Kelly offered, "that your Jimmie here, has a first-rate service record. And they'll be findin' him a place training recruits in his Commando methods. You mark my word!"

When Margaret and I were finally alone, I asked her a few questions, and the answers were all, "Yes."

Oh, and about the shaver. It was a total loss. Margaret promised me another one before she realized they aren't making them for the duration. So we compromised. I agreed to settle for a different kind. And to prove I'm no longer cop-shy, we're going to name the "little shaver" after a swell cop, Patrick J. Kelly.

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HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 8)

terlee, has been found dead in her own room, an apparent suicide by gas.

Sally doesn't believe it was a suicide. Upon investigation, neither does Dolliver. The dregs of a cup of coffee are found in the dead girl's room and Lubelle didn't drink coffee.

Then more trouble develops—they can't find Sally, either!

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detectives get ready for some solid reading pleasure!

In addition to the trio of featured novels, there will be a swell batch of short stories to round out next month's gala issue!

OUR MAIL BAG

That controversy started in the November issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** by Lansing H. Porter, of New York City, representing the Pros ("fer") and John Eaming Thatcher, of Patchogue, Long Island, representing the Cons ("agin") concerning the story, **SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME**, published in the September issue, has started a veritable Niagara of letters touching on and appertaining to the yarn in question.

We are very happy to report that the "Pros" far outnumber the "Cons." If we haven't already done so, allow us to thank Messrs. Porter and Thatcher for two very interesting letters on the subject of deduction vs. action in detective fiction. Mr. Porter takes the stand that brainwork in stories is more interesting than footwork.

Well, as we stated in the November issue, one of the reasons why we liked **SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME** was that the stage wasn't all cluttered up with bloody corpses like the last scene in Hamlet.

Here's a little boost from over on the Jersey side:

Purchased your **THRILLING DETECTIVE** for September and decided to write you concerning that short story, **ORDERS FROM THE BOSS**. I never did expect it to turn out the way it did, but I certainly enjoyed that little piece of tricky writing. How about some more of J. H. Martin?—*Marie M. Calletta, Hamonton, N. J.*

Thanks, friend Marie, and I'm sure J. H. Martin thanks you, too.

Here's a bit of a facetious slam from a

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chap down in Greenwich Village in New York, whose toes we seem to have stepped on—or is he pulling our leg? Anyway, here's the letter:

In your otherwise very good story, **THE PHANTOM BRIDEGROOM**, by G. T. Fleming-Roberts, published in the October issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** Magazine, you have cast considerable asparagus on dear old Carmine Street, where I am only too proud and happy to reside. We have no Club DeLisso, and don't tolerate night clubs at all. Also we have no need of an Oriental Rug emporium with the ridiculus sobriquet of Asjan and Sons. Above all, I resent the assumption that there might even be an alleyway unhealthily referred to as "Cockroach Court." Carmine Street is in a distinctly residential part of the Village.—*Harry Lombardo, New York, N. Y.*

Our humble apologies to both Carmine Street and The Village, Mr. Lombardo. Mr. Fleming-Roberts was only using author's license—somewhat similar to poetic license, we suppose. Perhaps the author should have played safe and used a fictitious name for the street. Our abject apologies to Carmine Street, with its wholesome atmosphere and artistic and historic associations.

Everybody—keep those comments and suggestions rolling in! Please address all your letters and postcards to The Editor, **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Let's have a word from you, pal.

Be seeing you next month.

—THE EDITOR.

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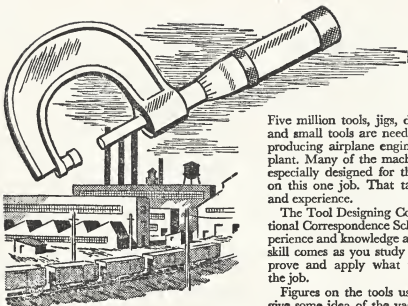


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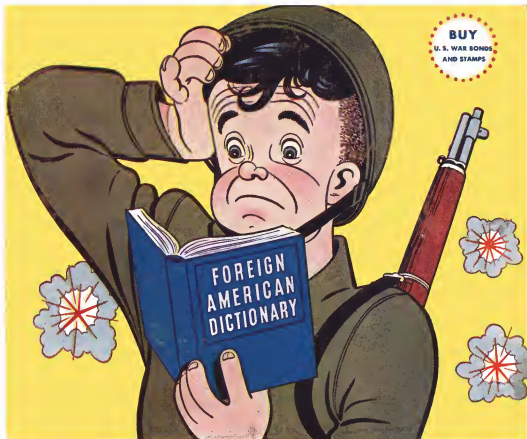
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